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William Cullen Bryant

Selections from His Poetry and Prose

Edited With An Introduction
by SAMUEL SILLEN

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WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

by Samuel Sillen

William Cullen Bryant's contribution to American literature and society can be fully appreciated only if we approach him both as editor and as poet. For, as Vernon Louis Parrington noted in his *Main Currents in American Thought*, Bryant was "the father of nineteenth-century American journalism as well as the father of nineteenth-century American poetry." The tendency of modern criticism to separate these phases of his career has produced a narrow and unjust estimate of the man. It is wiser to follow the lead of Ralph Waldo Emerson, who honored not only the "native, sincere, original, patriotic poet" in Bryant, but also "the accomplished journalist who . . . sounded the key-note of policy and public duty to the American people in a manner and with an effect of the highest service to the Republic."

For half a century—from the opening of Jackson's first administration to the close of Grant's second—Bryant wielded great influence as editor-in-chief of the *Evening Post* in New York. Through these years of national crisis and growth, Bryant wrote on every major American issue with extraordinary firmness and clarity. Under his direction, the *Evening Post* became one of the leading voices of progressive democracy, the champion of Jackson and Lincoln, boldly flying the banner of "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men."

To examine Bryant's poetry, early and late, against the background of his fifty years of crusading journalism is to

discover in his character and thought a consistency far more profound than has generally been recognized. For the poet and the publicist were animated by the same passion for freedom. The editor who helped found the Republican Party and introduced Lincoln to the famous Cooper Union meeting in 1860 was the poet who in 1861 wrote "Our Country's Call." The newspaper writer who defended Lovejoy and other Abolitionists against murderous pro-slavery mobs was the poet who eloquently celebrated "The Death of Slavery." The public figure who presided at a dinner for Kossuth and unveiled a statue of Mazzini was the same man of generous international sympathies who wrote such poems as "Italy" and "The Massacre at Scio."

This is hardly surprising. For while Bryant may lack the charm of waywardness, he cannot be accused of an eccentricity which is so often the mask of intellectual cowardice. Lincoln once said of Bryant: "It was worth the journey to the East merely to see such a man." And it is easy to imagine that Lincoln referred above all to Bryant's sincerity, integrity, and undeviating devotion to the democratic cause—qualities that were inevitably reflected in both his verse and prose.

As a poet-journalist Bryant had been preceded by Philip Freneau and was in turn to be the forerunner of Whittier, Lowell, and Whitman. Indeed, Bryant is best understood as a vital link between the generation of Revolutionary poets (Freneau, Barlow, Hopkinson, Trumbull) and the generation that was to achieve its highest power in the period from 1840 through the Civil War (Emerson, Longfellow, Whitman). The outstanding poet of the first third of the century, he bridges these generations in terms of ideas and of literary technique.

Bryant carried forward the Revolutionary tradition, bringing it powerfully to bear on the fight against slavery. He championed the principle of cultural independence for the young Republic at the same time that he embraced world culture. He articulated the growing sense of national pride while supporting the democratic movements in Europe and

South America. He was the citizen-poet, attaching himself with a mature sense of responsibility to the life of the nation as a whole, like Freneau in the earlier period, Whitman in the later.

In his verse technique as well, Bryant carries forward the pioneering work of the Revolutionary generation. Beginning with the tight eighteenth century forms, he introduces the variety and elasticity of nineteenth century Romanticism, while continuing to reflect the restraint and conventionality of neo-Classicism. By comparison with Barlow and Trumbull he is a bold innovator; by comparison with Whitman a relic of the past. His verse suggests the earliest spring thaws of American poetry rather than its full torrent. Seen in historical perspective, it was unquestionably a liberating influence of profound importance.

HIS LIFE

Whereas Walt Whitman was known as a newspaper editor before he turned his energies to poetry, Bryant had earned a reputation as America's outstanding poet, "the American Wordsworth," by the time he turned to newspaper work toward the end of the 1820's.

He was born on November 3, 1794, in Cummington, western Massachusetts. A descendant of the Mayflower's John Alden, he was brought up in a cultured middle-class family of Puritan New England background. His father, a physician, for a time represented Cummington in the Massachusetts legislature.

The Bryants lived on a farm surrounded by the beautiful Berkshires which were to color deeply the imagination of America's first important nature poet. "I was always, from my earliest years, a delighted observer of external nature," wrote Bryant in an autobiographical sketch. Though he was to spend most of his life in New York, he remained the poet of the New England countryside. "It is his proper praise," as Emerson said, "that he first, and he only, made known to

mankind our northern landscape—its summer splendor, its autumn russet, its winter light and glooms."

In his father's well stocked library the precocious, ailing boy read the English poets whom he began to imitate in his eighth year. Dr. Bryant was a strong Federalist, and his views were to be reflected in his son's first poetic pamphlet, issued in 1808: *The Embargo: or Sketches of the Times, a Satire; by a Youth of Thirteen.*

The later Bryant was hardly proud of this juvenile blast against Jefferson ("Go, wretch, resign the presidential chair!") and he excluded it from the collected edition of his work. But *The Embargo* is noteworthy because, together with his other boyhood verses, it reveals how much Bryant had to overcome in order to reach his advanced liberal position. He had to overcome the stilted literary devices of eighteenth century neo-Classicism before assuming leadership in the Romantic movement in American poetry. Before embracing Jacksonian Democracy he had to shed the conservative prejudices of Federalism.

By the time Bryant entered Williams College as a sophomore at fifteen, he had learned Greek and Latin under the private tutorship of clergymen. After a year at Williams, then a poverty-stricken college with a faculty of four, the youth decided to apply for admission to Yale. When his father's means did not permit this change, Bryant dropped out of school altogether. Thus, the poet who was to write the best-known American translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the young man who was to become the most scholarly editor in the country, had exactly one year of college training.

He was sent to study law with private practitioners, as was the custom in those days, and in 1815 he was admitted to the Massachusetts bar. From 1816 to 1825 Bryant practiced law in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, where he also served as town clerk and justice of the peace, hog reeve and clerk of the school district.

But poetry, not the law, was Bryant's genuine concern. In the fall of 1811, the year he withdrew from Williams,

he had written the first draft of "Thanatopsis." When it was finally submitted for publication in 1817, the editors of the *North American Review* were scarcely convinced that so fine a poem, showing such technical finish and imaginative breadth, could be the work of an American. Publication of "Thanatopsis" in 1817, together with "To a Waterfowl" and the critical essay "Early American Poetry" in 1818, catapulted Bryant into fame. In 1821, the year he married Frances Fairchild, "the fairest of the rural maids," Bryant was invited to read "The Ages" as the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard. A small collection of his verse appeared the same year.

By 1825 Bryant had achieved a reputation as the country's leading poet. Poetry, however, did not provide a livelihood, and Bryant, uninterested in his law work, came to New York as a "literary adventurer" seeking some kind of employment as a writer. In New York, already the country's literary capital with such citizens as Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper, Bryant obtained a post as editor of a newly founded literary monthly, the *New York Review*, and in 1826 he became co-editor of the *United States Review and Literary Gazette*. Bryant's "Lectures on Poetry" before the Athenaeum Society in 1825-26 established him as perhaps the most sensitive and judicious critic of the period before Poe and Emerson.

The turning point in Bryant's life came in 1827, when he accepted a "temporary position" on the newspaper with which he was to remain until his death fifty-one years later. In 1829 he became editor-in-chief of the *Evening Post*. As an owner of the paper he was eventually to acquire a fortune estimated at his death to be around a million dollars.

By the time he came to the *Evening Post*, Bryant had already broken with his Federalist background. Having studied the economic writings of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, he had become an ardent free-trader, opposing the corporate forms which the manufacturing and banking interests of the East were developing. Alarmed at the tendency of powerful groups to encourage a strongly centralized government, he shared the popular distrust of federal activity with regard to

internal improvements and banking, which had become associated with "special privilege." He followed with sympathy the strong democratic movement which culminated in the election of Andrew Jackson, who advanced the Jeffersonian principle that the government belonged to the people.

The *Evening Post* itself, curiously, had been founded as a Federalist organ by Alexander Hamilton and was for a time popularly referred to as "Hamilton's Gazette." With the breakdown of the Federalist Party in the "era of good feeling" following the War of 1812, it had lost much of its influence. When Bryant came to the paper, it was ready to be molded in a new direction.

The remainder of Bryant's life is inseparable from his editorial activity, which is treated in a later section of this introduction. The paper *was* his life. He was usually at his desk by eight in the morning and worked throughout the day. For a good many years he wrote nearly all the leading editorials, which very often reached eighteen hundred words. In addition, he handled an enormous correspondence, attended to business details, read widely, maintained contact with the leading figures of the time, wrote verse, and engaged in political activity. Even at eighty, Bryant devoted four hours a day to the *Evening Post*. As Allan Nevins, the historian of the paper, writes: "The editor viewed his calling as a jealous mistress, declining all suggestions of public office or any other diversion from it."

It is not true, however, as has often been suggested, that Bryant ceased to be a poet after he became an editor. About two-thirds of his verse lines were composed after 1829. Though not his most famous, these included some of his best poems, from "The Antiquity of Freedom" to "The Flood of Years," from "The Prairies" to "The Death of Slavery." Toward the very end of his life he published his translations of the *Iliad* (1870) and the *Odyssey* (1871-72).

Fond of travel, Bryant visited Europe six times, and his two series of *Letters of a Traveller* vividly record his impressions.

In 1843 he purchased a residence at Roslyn, Long Island, where he lived for the rest of his life. He died on June 12, 1878, two weeks after delivering his last public address at the unveiling of Mazzini's statue in Central Park.

THE POET

"It will never do to claim for Bryant a genius of the loftiest order," wrote Edgar Allan Poe in 1846, "but there has been latterly . . . a growing disposition to deny him *genius* in *any* respect. . . . Mr. Bryant has genius, and that of a marked character, but it has been overlooked by modern schools, because deficient in those externals which have become in a measure symbolical of those schools."

Poe was writing at a time when Longfellow and Lowell were the "moderns" who were displacing Bryant in the favor of poetry critics. How very much more appropriate are his words today, when Bryant is regarded not merely as old-fashioned, but as antediluvian!

Poe's balanced approach to Bryant has much to commend it. Bryant had neither the intensity, imaginative sweep, nor philosophical depth of a Shelley or Coleridge. He does not possess Poe's music, Emerson's compressed subtlety, or Whitman's amplitude of spirit. His verse, generally calm and contemplative, does not reveal profound inner struggle or development. Its range and tonal quality are limited.

But on his own level, admittedly not the highest, Bryant wrote with a sincerity and skill that win one's admiration despite all fluctuations of literary taste. It is partly true, as Lowell said in "A Fable for Critics" that Bryant "lacks the one merit of kindling enthusiasm":

> *There is Bryant, as quiet, as cool, and as dignified,*
> *As a smooth, silent iceberg, that never is ignified. . . .*

But it is equally true, as Lowell observed in another poem, "On Board the Seventy-six," that Bryant sang with feeling

"of freedom's birthright," that "The torrents flashed and tumbled in his song," and that

> *We, listening, learned what makes the might of words—*
> *Manhood to back them, constant as a star.*

For if the surface of Bryant's verse is characteristically calm, it is not the placidity of shallow feeling but the restrained simplicity of a man who, to quote Emerson again, "is original because he is sincere." Utterly free of pose, Bryant represents the best features of the Puritan tradition, its stern sense of duty, its austerity and solidity, tempered by a nature essentially generous and sympathetic.

In his literary theory as well as in his own practice, Bryant may indeed be considered the "father of nineteenth-century American poetry." For he reflected and sharpened the desire of progressive writers in the young Republic to create a culture that was not slavishly derivative of European models. Some writers at the beginning of the century bemoaned the "paucity of national traditions" and described the beauty of the American landscape as that of "a face without expression." This negative view was vigorously rejected by Bryant, who insisted that all the elements of "beauty and grandeur, intellectual greatness and moral truth" exist in our country and that "if under these circumstances our poetry should finally fail of rivalling that of Europe, it will be because genius sits idle in the midst of its treasures."

On the other hand, Bryant recognized that extravagant admiration of American writing simply because it was American could scarcely encourage a thriving literature in the young country. The American poet "must produce more satisfactory evidence of his claim to celebrity than an extract from the parish register." Thus, Bryant performed a most valuable function by mediating between a vulgar chauvinism and a crippling sense of national inferiority, between a stubborn disdain for European, especially English, models and a "sickly and affected imitation" of them.

A precursor of Whitman in his emphasis on truthful, first-

hand observation of American nature, Bryant reprimanded his brother for writing a poem to a skylark, for "The skylark is an English bird, and an American who has never visited Europe has no right to be in raptures about it." Bryant preferred to address the waterfowl, whose distant flight he could follow with his own eyes. In this respect, as in so many others, Bryant's influence on his younger contemporaries was considerable. Longfellow did not speak for himself alone when he wrote to Bryant, "When I look back upon my earlier years, I cannot but smile to see how much in them is really yours."

First and last Bryant emphasized that "the great spring of poetry" is strength and sincerity of emotion, and when he heard some writers talk of "pure poetry," he questioned "by what authority these gentlemen take the term poetry from the people, and thus limit its meaning." Adding that poetry appeals not only to the passions and the imagination but to the understanding as well, Bryant took issue with those who saw a contradiction between poetry and science. He could not for one moment agree that poetry had no place in a scientific age. "Poetry," he said, "is the worst mask in the world behind which folly and stupidity could attempt to hide their features."

In nature he found his favorite theme for verse; there is hardly an urban image to be found in the whole range of Bryant's poetry. He was the poet of an agricultural society, the society of pre-industrial America, and he drew heavily on his early countryside impressions—"the splendors of a winter daybreak over the wide wastes of snow seen from our windows, the glories of the autumnal woods, the gloomy approaches of the thunderstorm, and its departure amid sunshine and rainbows, the return of spring with its flowers, and the first snowfall of winter." These images he recalls in most of his poems, especially the earlier ones, whose descriptive titles range from "The Yellow Violet" and "A Walk at Sunset" to "A Winter Piece" and "The West Wind."

But in this regard he was also the child of his poetic generation. For he came early under the influence of the English Romantic poets Coleridge, Southey, and Wordsworth, who

encouraged his revolt against the tradition of Alexander Pope and confirmed his interest in nature as a theme for descriptive and philosophic verse. Upon reading Wordsworth, as he wrote his friend Richard H. Dana, "a thousand springs seemed to gush up at once" in his heart, and "the face of Nature of a sudden to change into a strange freshness and life."

The nature poems express a variety of moods. At times, as in "Green River," he turns to nature for an image of serenity, of retreat from the fever of life. In "Autumn Woods" he writes, not without sentimentality:

Ah! 'twere a lot too blest
Forever in thy colored shades to stray;
Amid the kisses of the soft southwest
To roam and dream for aye;

And leave the vain low strife
That makes men mad—the tug for wealth and power—
The passions and the cares that wither life,
And waste its little hour.

Bryant is more mature when, in "After a Tempest," he translates the feeling of tranquility in nature into an image of international peace:

When o'er earth's continents, and isles between,
The noise of war shall cease from sea to sea,
And married nations dwell in harmony;
When millions, crouching in the dust to one,
No more shall beg their lives on bended knee,
Nor the black stake be dressed, nor in the sun
The o'erlabored captive toil, and wish his life were done.

Bryant believed in "infusing a moral sentiment into natural objects, and bringing images of visible beauty and majesty to heighten the effect of moral sentiment." The idea is valid, but undeniably Bryant executes it much too mechanically in a poem like "The Yellow Violet," which after describing the lone flower with simple beauty concludes with a moral chastising those who climb to wealth and ungratefully forget their

friends. This poem illustrates what must be considered a failing in a number of Bryant's poems, his tendency to tack on a moral with the consequence that he produces a dry and at times irritating didacticism.

But it is a mistaken view, too widely held unfortunately, that Bryant is characteristically a didactic poet in this narrow sense. In his best poems, the moral image and the poetic image are fused, and, what is perhaps more important, the moral truth often has profundity and grandeur. Students of Bryant have by and large failed to note that his poetic morality is to an impressive degree based on a conception of human dignity and political freedom.

Consider, for example, a poem like "To a Cloud," which on the surface appears to be a "nature poem" pure and simple. The poet begins, rather conventionally, by addressing the cloud, its "fleeces bathed in sunlight." He wishes that he could be carried away on it to distant Andalusia and Italy. But in the middle of the poem, as the poet thinks of Greece, the mood shifts. The poet now thinks of Greece "long fettered and oppressed," whose brave sons have risen against Turkish domination:

Ay, we would linger, till the sunset there
Should come, to purple all the air,
And thou reflect upon the sacred ground
The ruddy radiance streaming round.

Similarly, "The Winds" cannot be considered a "nature poem" primarily any more than Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind":

O ye wild winds! a mightier power than yours
In chains upon the shore of Europe lies;
The sceptred throng whose fetters he endures
Watch his mute throes with terror in their eyes;
And armed warriors all around him stand,
And, as he struggles, tighten every band,
And lift the heavy spear, with threatening hand,
To pierce the victim, should he strive to rise.

Thus, in addition to celebrating the oneness of nature, as in "The Evening Wind"; the majesty of creation, as in "A Forest Hymn"; the ancient and abiding character of nature, as in "A Walk at Sunset"; Bryant, in some of his most forceful poems, links nature with liberty. The poet of American nature is simultaneously the bard of American freedom.

The history of America's struggles for liberty powerfully appealed to his imagination. In "Song of Marion's Men" he recalls the exploits of General Francis Marion, the South Carolina "swamp-fox," famous partisan warrior of the American Revolution. "The Green Mountain Boys" celebrates the Vermonters under Ethan Allen who stormed Fort Ticonderoga. "Seventy-Six" deals with the heroes of Concord and Lexington, "The Twenty-Second of December" with the landing of the Pilgrims:

Wild was the day; the wintry sea
Moaned sadly on New-England's strand,
When first the thoughtful and the free,
Our fathers, trod the desert land.

In "Oh Mother of a Mighty Race" the poet speaks with pride of an America that provided a haven "For Earth's down-trodden and opprest. . . ."

At the same time, his healthy patriotism did not exclude a deep concern for the fate of other peoples. Bryant, like Whitman, wrote a number of striking poems dealing with the liberation struggles of oppressed people abroad.

Like Lord Byron, one of his masters, Bryant was especially moved by the Greek War of Independence, in which another Massachusetts man, Samuel Gridley Howe, was serving as Chief Surgeon. His fiery poem "The Massacre at Scio" deals with the butchery of the Sciotes by the Turks. Another poem of 1824 is entitled "Song of the Greek Amazon" while a third appeared the following year headed "The Greek Partisan." These poems show Bryant in a fighting mood which anticipates his ardent editorials.

Similarly, the poet was interested in Spanish Independence. His "Spain," written in 1822, expressing the bitterness of defeat, berates those who gave up their country to tyrants, but ends with the hopeful prophecy that the spirit of freedom

Lives, and repressed, shall rise one day more strong—
Rise and redeem your shackled race once more,
And crush, mid showers of blood and shrieks and groans,
Mitres and stars and thrones.

In "Romero" as well, he deals with the Spanish fight against feudalism and particularly with one warrior who was exiled by "Spain's degenerate sons," the Francos of that day. Here too he balances profound grief with the resolution to hit back.

One of Bryant's finest poems, written many years later, in 1860, is "Italy," which voices in a spirited, original form his strong support of the Italian struggle for independence and national unification. Bryant's interest in Italian progress is further reflected in his address on "Italian Unity" and his last public speech on "Mazzini," which looks forward to the day "far distant though it may be—when the rights and duties of human brotherhood shall be acknowledged by all the races of mankind."

Supporting the South American countries in their revolts against Spanish oppression, Bryant strongly defended the character and conduct of Simon Bolivar. In this connection, it is interesting to find Bryant, as early as 1827, translating a poem by the Cuban Jose Maria de Heredia. Indeed, Bryant's many fine translations from the Spanish, German, and Provençal suggest not only his rich literary culture but his broad sympathies.

Thus, it was the contemporary struggles for freedom as well as "The Antiquity of Freedom" that Bryant celebrated. He represented the finest traditions of American internationalism, holding with Daniel Webster that "Our place is on the side of free institutions" throughout the world.

It is noteworthy that as a poet Bryant wrote very little on the

anti-slavery struggle, "The African Chief" being a striking exception. The explanation is undoubtedly to be sought in the fact that he was expressing himself day in and day out in his impassioned editorial columns. Yet it remains true that, unlike Whittier or Lowell, he was not the anti-slavery poet except in a very general sense. When the Civil War broke out, he was moved to write two songs that were widely quoted: "Not Yet" and "Our Country's Call." During the war, Bryant wrote "The Poet," which advised writers that if they wished to earn the name of poet among mankind, they must clothe their words in flame:

Deem not the framing of a deathless lay
The pastime of a drowsy summer day . . .

Scale, with the assaulting host, the rampart's height,
And strike and struggle in the thickest fight.

At the end of the war, he composed a reverent elegy on "The Death of Lincoln" on the occasion of the funeral procession through New York. "The Death of Slavery" was a triumphant ode in which Bryant summed up his passionate hatred of slavery as a wasting plague "accursed of God":

A glory clothes the land from sea to sea
For the great land and all its coasts are free.

The ethical idealism of this poem is characteristic of Bryant's entire work. As a boy he had clung to an orthodox Calvinism, but with the progress of years he had been attracted to a religious faith which may best be characterized as a liberal Unitarianism. His God was a just God who exacted justice from his worshippers, not formal adherence to doctrine. Believing in the perfectibility of man, in the ultimate victory of goodness over evil, he viewed man's inhumanity to man as an affront to God. Unorthodox as it seemed to many contemporaries, Bryant's work is permeated with a devout faith "In God's magnificent works" and an unwavering confidence that "love and peace shall make their paradise with man."

These convictions sustain a poet who associates himself in spirit with all of suffering and aspiring mankind. Limited in range, rarely able to rise to the peaks, Bryant nevertheless contributed a body of poetry that will survive because it genuinely expresses the dignity of man's striving for freedom, truth, and justice. These words, for Bryant, were not abstractions. They had meaning in terms of human struggle. "The Battle-Field," he calls one of his finest poems. It describes himself, as a progressive editor, being hounded in a friendless warfare by "A wild and many-weaponed throng." Yet he nerves his spirit, and he goes on fighting, confident that

Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again
Th' eternal years of God are hers;
But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies among his worshippers.

This manly, hopeful spirit, which gives his poetry a strong moral fiber, was to survive the test of action in his long editorial career.

THE EDITOR

When Bryant became editor-in-chief of the *Evening Post* in 1829, he felt compelled to define his conception of journalistic responsibility. He was aware that the newspaper editors of the day were not highly esteemed by the community for the most part. This was true because "professing, as they do, one of the noblest sciences, that of politics—in other words, the science of legislation and government—they too often profess it in a narrow, ignorant, ignoble spirit."

"Yet the vocation of the newspaper editor," Bryant added, "is a useful and indispensable, and, if rightly exercised, a noble vocation. It possesses this essential element of dignity—that they who are engaged in it are occupied with questions of the highest importance to mankind. We cannot see, for our part,

why it should not attract men of the first talents and the most exalted virtues. Why should not the discussions of the daily press demand as strong reasoning powers, as large and comprehensive ideas, as profound an acquaintance with principles, eloquence as commanding, and a style of argument as manly and elevated, as the debates of the Senate?"

In part, this passage suggests that Bryant was seeking to reassure himself that his new profession would not ultimately defeat his moral idealism and the integrity of his career as a writer. But this was far more than a rationalization. For Bryant was in fact stating a purpose to which he consistently adhered.

And in clinging to his credo, he was to raise the whole level of American journalism. Under his administration, the *Evening Post* was to maintain a standard of dignity, good judgment, and public service that furnished a brilliant contrast to the sensational, often unscrupulous journalism of James Gordon Bennett and the *New York Herald*, whose "nauseous" practices Bryant despised.

One of the great American editors, Bryant had no equal before Horace Greeley. According to Allan Nevins, historian of the *Evening Post:* "No American editor of importance had made such use of the editorial page as he began to make. He had a love of freedom, a sense of justice, and a shrewd judgment of men and affairs, which his retiring nature debarred him from bringing into play in any other way." Most of Bryant's editorials are written with scholarship, clarity, and wit. But above all they are notable for the clear-cut, courageous views which they set forth on the most vital issues of the day.

An ardent Jacksonian, the young editor threw himself into political affairs with energy and zeal. In his early days he was fortunate to have as an assistant William Leggett, a brilliant journalist, ex-midshipman and poet, who battled strenuously against every political and economic abuse. More radical than Bryant, Leggett paced the editor-in-chief in supporting the

laboring classes, the Abolitionists, and the most progressive elements of the Jacksonian democracy. Leggett crusaded against the monopolists, speculators, and aristocrats. Walt Whitman coupled "the great Jefferson and the glorious Leggett," while Whittier said of Leggett that "no one has labored more perseveringly, or, in the end, more successfully, to bring the practice of American democracy into conformity with its professions." Unfortunately, this colorful figure died in 1839 at the age of thirty-eight.

More restrained than Leggett, Bryant nevertheless was in essential agreement with him, and the opposition press dubbed these poet-editors "The Chaunting Cherubs of the *Evening Post*."

But there was nothing cherubic about the *Post's* editorial stand on the right of workingmen to organize into trade unions. As early as 1834 the paper had supported this right in a pioneering editorial by Leggett. In 1835 the paper argued that the entire nation would benefit from the objectives of the unions: fewer hours, higher wages, public education, and economic prosperity. In May 1836 the issue of organization came to a head when twenty-one journeyman tailors, having formed a union, were indicted for conspiracy injurious to trade and commerce. When a certain Judge Edwards charged the jury to find the tailors guilty, the New York press took the side of the judge. All, that is, except the *Evening Post*. On June 13, 1836, Bryant wrote an editorial on "The Right of Workmen to Strike," in which he said:

"They [the tailors] were condemned because they had determined not to work for the wages that were offered them! Can anything be imagined more abhorrent to every sentiment of generosity or justice, than the law which arms the rich with the legal right to fix, by assize, the wages of the poor? If this is not SLAVERY, we have forgotten its definition. Strike the right of associating for the sale of labor from the privileges of a freeman, and you may as well bind him to a master, or ascribe him to the soil."

The issue blazed; mass meetings of mechanics were held in City Hall Park. Bryant continued to champion the workmen, and he was able thenceforth to count on their strong support. On the other hand, the business classes of New York withdrew their advertisements from the *Post*, unable to forgive a cultivated gentleman for lending his support to the laboring man.

Bryant had to contend with these respectable citizens when he advocated freedom of speech for Abolitionists. For example, when the New York Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1833, magistrates joined with mobs in breaking up their meetings while the churches nodded their approval. During 1834, partly as a result of newspaper provocations against the Abolitionists, a Negro schoolhouse was wrecked on Orange Street and Negro churches were destroyed. The colored people of New York were forced to flee to the open fields in upper New York. Though infantry and cavalry arrived to quell the riot, no punitive measures were taken. The *Evening Post*, thoroughly aroused, called for the city's entire military force to patrol the city and shoot down the anti-Negro mobs:

"Let them be fired upon, if they dare collect together to prosecute their infamous designs. Let those who make the first move to sedition be shot down like dogs—and thus teach to their infatuated followers a lesson which no milder course seems sufficient to inculcate. This is no time for expostulation or remonstrance."

This fighting stand also characterized Bryant's support of ex-President John Quincy Adams, who in 1836 fought in the House of Representatives against the gag resolution on Abolitionist petitions to Congress. Bryant wrote:

"It is no time to use honeyed words when the liberty of speech is endangered. . . . The spirit of our people has been too long accustomed to freedom to bear the restraint which is sought to be put upon it. Discussion will be like the Greek fire, which blazed the fiercer for the water thrown upon it;

and if the stake be set and the faggots ready, there will be candidates for martyrdom."

Bryant's ire was especially aroused when freedom of the press was threatened by pro-slavery mobs. In August, 1836, when James G. Birney's press was threatened with violence in Cincinnati, he wrote:

"We hold that this combination of the few to govern the many by the terror of illegal violence is as wicked and indefensible as a conspiracy to rob on the highway. We hold it to be the duty of good citizens to protest against it whenever and wherever it shows itself, and to resist it if necessary to the death."

And when the Abolitionist editor Elijah P. Lovejoy did resist to his death at Alton, Illinois, in 1837, Bryant wrote another editorial that blazed with wrath.

During this early period, Bryant was not himself an Abolitionist. The *Evening Post* remained a Democratic paper until Pierce's administration, by which time it had become painfully obvious that the Democratic Party was only a tool of the slave oligarchy. But it was a Free-Soil Democratic organ, and in 1848 Bryant, like Whitman, joined the "Barnburners" or radical wing of the party. Whitman was fired as editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle* for this action, but Bryant, as owner of his paper, could carry on the struggle. In the fateful decade from 1850 to the outbreak of war, he fought without compromise for the defeat of slavery.

The editor passionately denounced the Fugitive Slave Law as "the most ruffianly act ever authorized by a deliberative assembly" and the Dred Scott decision as a "disgrace." He staunchly defended John Brown as one of the "martyrs and heroes" of history. Bryant urged that the North send emigrants to Kansas and Nebraska to uphold the banner of free soil. By the middle of the decade, Bryant's paper was as "black Republican" as Greeley's *Tribune*.

Indeed, Bryant helped found the Republican Party in 1855 as a new political expression of the free-soil principle, and in

1856 he supported its first candidate for President, John C. Frémont. When Frémont was defeated by Buchanan, the pro-slavery candidate of the Democrats, Bryant was not disheartened. He read the future correctly:

"We have at least laid the basis of a formidable and well-organized party, in opposition to the spread of slavery—which is the scandal of the country and the age.... The cause is not going back—it is going rapidly forward; the free-soil party of 1848 is the nucleus of the Republican party of 1856; but with what accessions of numbers, of moral power, of influence, not merely in public assemblies, but at the domestic fireside!"

Bryant supported Lincoln's candidacy. The *Evening Post* had followed closely the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 and concluded that "No man of this generation has grown more rapidly before the country than Mr. Lincoln in this canvass." When Lincoln visited New York to make his famous speech at Cooper Institute on February 27, 1860, Bryant presided at the rally, introducing Lincoln as one of the "children of the West [that] form a living bulwark against the advance of slavery, and from them is recruited the vanguard of the mighty armies of liberty." The *Post* supported Lincoln's nomination more warmly than any other great Eastern newspaper. Bryant congratulated the country on the wisdom of its choice.

During the war, Bryant's paper bitterly fought Copperheads and appeasers. New York's pro-Southern press, like Bennett's *Herald* and the *Daily News*, found in Bryant a formidable and vigilant opponent. He denounced the Copperheads who inspired the draft riots. He exposed the intrigues and maneuvers of the "miscreant" Mayor Fernando Wood.

Bryant pressed Lincoln for quicker and more decisive action. Like such penetrating European observers of the war as Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, he urged the removal of the "slothful" General McClellan, whose dilatory tactics, politically inspired, were imperiling the Union cause. Criticizing

the "weakness and vacillation" of the Administration, Bryant noted the "drowsy influence of border state opiates." Bryant joined with Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens in pressing Lincoln to proclaim emancipation as an imperative war measure. And when the President announced his forthcoming proclamation, Bryant rejoiced that

"It puts us right before Europe; it brings us back to our traditions; it animates our soldiers with the same spirit which led our forefathers to victory under Washington; they are fighting today, as the Revolutionary patriots fought, in the interest of the human race, for human rights...."

While making his just criticisms, Bryant at no point wavered in his support of the war's central aims. On the issue of Lincoln's re-election he wrote one of the most notable editorials in American newspaper history, "A Certain and an Uncertain Policy," which indicted the political opponents of Lincoln as a set of jumping-jacks who wished but did not dare to come out openly for peace at any price. Nobody appreciated more than Bryant the remarkable growth of Lincoln during the war years. None supported his re-election more ardently.

The *Evening Post's* record during Reconstruction does not show the same political insight. Bryant opposed the views of such advanced thinkers as Thaddeus Stevens and other "radical Republicans" who sought to complete the democratic revolution against the slave system by establishing full economic and political rights for the freedmen. Bryant, favoring a "moderate" policy toward the secessionists, sought to end military rule in the South as quickly as possible. He favored equality before the law for the Negroes, but at the same time felt that the Southern ballot should be based on an "educational test." The *Evening Post* generally supported President Johnson's policies, but expressed disgust with Johnson himself when he threatened to hang Thaddeus Stevens. "It is a melancholy reflection," said the *Post*, "to those who have found it their duty to support that policy [Johnson's], that their most damag-

ing opponent is the President. . . ." The *Evening Post* opposed Johnson's impeachment, however. At the same time, with increasing evidences of Southern denial of Negro rights, the paper advocated a stiffer policy to guarantee those rights.

While the slavery issue occupied the bulk of Bryant's attention as an editor, he had, of course, occasion to comment on a host of questions, ranging from civic reform to banking policy. Bryant was the first editor to project the idea of a steam subway for New York. He crusaded for the setting aside of a Central Park. He attacked the city's deplorable tenement-house condition. He denounced the Tweed Ring and exposed corruption under the Grant Administration. Bryant's editorials cover the whole range of community and national affairs of his time, and whether he is proposing a nickel five-cent piece or penny postage, street cleaning machines or police uniforms, his writing always reflects a progressive mind ever alert to the interests of the entire community.

The editor, like the poet, was, as he said of Mazzini, an "illustrious champion of civil and religious liberty." With great learning and eloquence he devoted a rich lifetime to the fight for freedom and democracy. That he should be remembered primarily as a somewhat innocuous nature poet is one of those innumerable scandals of our literary history that make one blush. To read him is to dethrone a legend and discover a man, one of the noblest in our national tradition.

The poems included in this volume appear in their complete form. They are arranged chronologically, with the year of composition noted at the end. The prose selections, mainly excerpted, are also arranged in the order of their publication.

The Poetical Works of William Cullen Bryant (2 vols., 1883) and *Prose Writings of William Cullen Bryant* (2 vols., 1884) were edited by Parke Godwin, Bryant's son-in-law and editorial associate on the *Evening Post*. Parke Godwin is also the author of the standard Bryant biography, *A Biography of William Cullen Bryant, with Extracts from His Private Correspondence* (2 vols., 1883).

THANATOPSIS

To him who in the love of Nature holds
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
A various language; for his gayer hours
She has a voice of gladness, and a smile
And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
Into his darker musings, with a mild
And healing sympathy, that steals away
Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts
Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
Over thy spirit, and sad images
Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,
And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,
Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart;—
Go forth, under the open sky, and list
To Nature's teachings, while from all around—
Earth and her waters, and the depths of air—
Comes a still voice—Yet a few days, and thee
The all-beholding sun shall see no more
In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,
Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears,
Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist
Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again,
And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
Thine individual being, shalt thou go
To mix for ever with the elements,
To be a brother to the insensible rock
And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak
Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.

Yet not to thine eternal resting-place
Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
With patriarchs of the infant world—with kings,
The powerful of the earth—the wise, the good,
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulchre. The hills
Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun,—the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods—rivers that move
In majesty, and the complaining brooks
That make the meadows green; and, poured round all,
Old Ocean's gray and melancholy waste,—
Are but the solemn decorations all
Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun,
The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
Are shining on the sad abodes of death,
Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
The globe are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings
Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,
Save his own dashings—yet the dead are there:
And millions in those solitudes, since first
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.
So shalt thou rest, and what if thou withdraw
In silence from the living, and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
Plod on, and each one as before will chase
His favorite phantom; yet all these shall leave
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come
And make their bed with thee. As the long train
Of ages glide away, the sons of men,

The youth in life's green spring, and he who goes
In the full strength of years, matron and maid,
The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man—
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side,
By those, who in their turn shall follow them.

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death,
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

1811

THE YELLOW VIOLET

When beechen buds begin to swell,
And woods the blue-bird's warble know,
The yellow violet's modest bell
Peeps from the last year's leaves below.

Ere russet fields their green resume,
Sweet flower, I love, in forest bare,
To meet thee, when thy faint perfume
Alone is in the virgin air.

Of all her train, the hands of Spring
First plant thee in the watery mould,
And I have seen thee blossoming
Beside the snow-bank's edges cold.

Thy parent sun, who bade thee view
Pale skies, and chilling moisture sip,
Has bathed thee in his own bright hue,
And streaked with jet thy glowing lip.

Yet slight thy form, and low thy seat,
And earthward bent thy gentle eye,
Unapt the passing view to meet
When loftier flowers are flaunting nigh.

Oft, in the sunless April day,
Thy early smile has stayed my walk;
But midst the gorgeous blooms of May,
I passed thee on thy humble stalk.

So they, who climb to wealth, forget
The friends in darker fortunes tried.
I copied them—but I regret
That I should ape the ways of pride.

And when again the genial hour
Awakes the painted tribes of light,
I'll not o'erlook the modest flower
That made the woods of April bright.

1814

TO A WATERFOWL

Whither, midst falling dew,
While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
Thy solitary way?

Vainly the fowler's eye
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,
As, darkly seen against the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seek'st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide,
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean-side?

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—
The desert and illimitable air—
Lone wandering, but not lost.

All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near.

And soon that toil shall end;
Soon shalt thou find a summer home, and rest,
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend,
Soon, o'er thy sheltered nest.

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven
Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart
Deeply has sunk the lesson thou hast given,
And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

1815

SPAIN

Aye, wear the chain—ye who for once have known
The sweets of freedom—yet could crouch again
In blind and trembling worship of a throne;
Aye wear—for ye are worthy—wear the chain
And bow, till ye are weary, to the yoke
Your patriot fathers broke.

Degenerate Spaniards! let the priestly band
Possess your realm again; and let them wake
The fires of pious murder in your land,

And drag your best and bravest to the stake,
And tread down truth, and in the dungeon bind
The dreaded strength of mind.

Give up the promise of bright days that cast
A glory on your nation from afar;
Call back the darkness of the ages past
To quench that holy dawn's new-risen star;
Let only tyrants and their slaves be found
Alive on Spanish ground.

Yet mark! ye cast the gift of heaven away,
And your best blood for this shall yet be shed;
The fire shall waste your borders, and the way
Be covered with its heaps of festering dead,
And vultures of the cliff on every plain
Feast high upon the slain.

The spirit that of yore had slept so long,
Then woke, and drove the Moors to Afric's shore,
Lives, and repressed, shall rise one day more strong—
Rise and redeem your shackled race once more,
And crush, mid showers of blood and shrieks and groans,
Mitres and stars and thrones.

1822

THE MASSACRE AT SCIO

Weep not for Scio's children slain;
Their blood, by Turkish falchions shed,
Sends not its cry to Heaven in vain
For vengeance on the murderer's head.

Though high the warm red torrent ran
Between the flames that lit the sky,
Yet, for each drop, an armèd man
Shall rise, to free the land, or die.

And for each corpse, that in the sea
Was thrown, to feast the scaly herds,
A hundred of the foe shall be
A banquet for the mountain-birds.

Stern rites and sad shall Greece ordain
To keep that day along her shore,
Till the last link of slavery's chain
Is shattered, to be worn no more.

1824

LOVE'S SEASONS. A SONG

Dost thou idly ask to hear
At what gentle seasons
Nymphs relent, when lovers near
Press the tenderest reasons?
Ah, they give their faith too oft
To the careless wooer;
Maidens' hearts are always soft:
Would that men's were truer!

Woo the fair one when around
Early birds are singing;
When, o'er all the fragrant ground,
Early herbs are springing;
When the brookside, bank, and grove,
All with blossoms laden,
Shine with beauty, breathe of love,—
Woo the timid maiden.

Woo her when, with rosy blush,
Summer eve is sinking;
When, on rills that softly gush,
Stars are softly winking;
When through boughs that knit the bower
Moonlight gleams are stealing;

Woo her, till the gentle hour
Wake a gentler feeling.

Woo her, when autumnal dyes
Tinge the woody mountain;
When the dropping foliage lies
In the weedy fountain;
Let the scene, that tells how fast
Youth is passing over,
Warn her, ere her bloom is past,
To secure her lover.

Woo her when the north winds call
At the lattice nightly;
When, within the cheerful hall,
Blaze the fagots brightly;
While the wintry tempest round
Sweeps the landscape hoary,
Sweeter in her ear shall sound
Love's delightful story.

1824

"I BROKE THE SPELL THAT HELD ME LONG"

I broke the spell that held me long,
The dear, dear witchery of song.
I said, the poet's idle lore
Shall waste my prime of years no more,
For Poetry, though heavenly born,
Consorts with poverty and scorn.

I broke the spell—nor deemed its power
Could fetter me another hour.
Ah, thoughtless! how could I forget
Its causes were around me yet?
For wheresoe'er I looked, the while,
Was Nature's everlasting smile.

Still came and lingered on my sight
Of flowers and streams the bloom and light,
And glory of the stars and sun;
And these and poetry are one.
They, ere the world had held me long,
Recalled me to the love of song.

1824

HYMN OF THE WALDENSES

Hear, Father, hear thy faint afflicted flock
Cry to thee, from the desert and the rock;
While those, who seek to slay thy children, hold
Blasphemous worship under roofs of gold;
And the broad goodly lands, with pleasant airs
That nurse the grape and wave the grain, are theirs.

Yet better were this mountain wilderness,
And this wild life of danger and distress—
Watchings by night and perilous flight by day,
And meetings in the depths of earth to pray—
Better, far better, than to kneel with them,
And pay the impious rite thy laws condemn.

Thou, Lord, dost hold the thunder; the firm land
Tosses in billows when it feels thy hand;
Thou dashest nation against nation, then
Stillest the angry world to peace again.
Oh, touch their stony hearts who hunt thy sons—
The murderers of our wives and little ones.

Yet, mighty God, yet shall thy frown look forth
Unveiled, and terribly shall shake the earth.
Then the foul power of priestly sin and all
Its long-upheld idolatries shall fall.
Thou shalt raise up the trampled and oppressed,
And thy delivered saints shall dwell in rest.

1824

MUTATION

They talk of short-lived pleasure—be it so—
  Pain dies as quickly: stern, hard-featured Pain
Expires, and lets her weary prisoner go.
  The fiercest agonies have shortest reign;
  And after dreams of horror, comes again
The welcome morning with its rays of peace.
  Oblivion, softly wiping out the stain,
Makes the strong secret pangs of shame to cease:
Remorse is virtue's root; its fair increase
  Are fruits of innocence and blessedness;
Thus joy, o'erborne and bound, doth still release
  His young limbs from the chains that round him press.
Weep not that the world changes—did it keep
A stable, changeless state, 'twere cause indeed to weep.

1824

NOVEMBER

Yet one smile more, departing, distant sun!
  One mellow smile through the soft vapory air,
Ere, o'er the frozen earth, the loud winds run,
  Or snows are sifted o'er the meadows bare.
One smile on the brown hills and naked trees,
  And the dark rocks whose summer wreaths are cast,
And the blue gentian-flower, that, in the breeze,
  Nods lonely, of her beauteous race the last.
Yet a few sunny days, in which the bee
  Shall murmur by the hedge that skirts the way,
The cricket chirp upon the russet lea,
  And man delight to linger in thy ray.
Yet one rich smile, and we will try to bear
The piercing winter frost, and winds, and darkened air.

1824

TO A CLOUD

Beautiful cloud! with folds so soft and fair,
  Swimming in the pure quiet air!
Thy fleeces bathed in sunlight, while below
  Thy shadow o'er the vale moves slow;
Where, midst their labor, pause the reaper train,
  As cool it comes along the grain.

Beautiful cloud! I would I were with thee
  In thy calm way o'er land and sea;
To rest on thy unrolling skirts, and look
  On Earth as on an open book;
On streams that tie her realms with silver bands,
  And the long ways that seam her lands;
And hear her humming cities, and the sound
  Of the great ocean breaking round.
Ay—I would sail, upon thy air-borne car,
  To blooming regions distant far,
To where the sun of Andalusia shines
  On his own olive-groves and vines,
Or the soft lights of Italy's clear sky
  In smiles upon her ruins lie.

But I would woo the winds to let us rest
  O'er Greece, long fettered and oppressed,
Whose sons at length have heard the call that comes
  From the old battle-fields and tombs,
And risen, and drawn the sword, and on the foe
  Have dealt the swift and desperate blow,
And the Othman power is cloven, and the stroke
  Has touched its chains, and they are broke.
Ay, we would linger, till the sunset there
  Should come, to purple all the air,
And thou reflect upon the sacred ground
  The ruddy radiance streaming round.

Bright meteor! for the summer noontide made!
Thy peerless beauty yet shall fade.
The sun, that fills with light each glistening fold,
Shall set, and leave thee dark and cold:
The blast shall rend thy skirts, or thou mayst frown
In the dark heaven when storms come down;
And weep in rain, till man's inquiring eye
Miss thee, forever, from the sky.

1824

THE AFRICAN CHIEF

Chained in the market-place he stood,
A man of giant frame,
Amid the gathering multitude
That shrunk to hear his name—
All stern of look and strong of limb,
His dark eye on the ground:—
And silently they gazed on him
As on a lion bound.

Vainly, but well, that chief had fought,
He was a captive now,
Yet pride, that fortune humbles not,
Was written on his brow.
The scars his dark broad bosom wore
Showed warrior true and brave;
A prince among his tribe before,
He could not be a slave.

Then to his conqueror he spake:
"My brother is a king;
Undo this necklace from my neck,
And take this bracelet ring,
And send me where my brother reigns,
And I will fill thy hands
With store of ivory from the plains,
And gold-dust from the sands."

"Not for thy ivory nor thy gold
Will I unbind thy chain;
That bloody hand shall never hold
The battle-spear again.
A price thy nation never gave
Shall yet be paid for thee;
For thou shalt be the Christian's slave,
In lands beyond the sea."

Then wept the warrior chief, and bade
To shred his locks away;
And one by one, each heavy braid
Before the victor lay.
Thick were the platted locks, and long,
And closely hidden there
Shone many a wedge of gold among
The dark and crispèd hair.

"Look, feast thy greedy eye with gold
Long kept for sorest need;
Take it—thou askest sums untold—
And say that I am freed.
Take it—my wife, the long, long day,
Weeps by the cocoa-tree,
And my young children leave their play,
And ask in vain for me."

"I take thy gold, but I have made
Thy fetters fast and strong,
And ween that by the cocoa-shade
Thy wife will wait thee long."
Strong was the agony that shook
The captive's frame to hear,
And the proud meaning of his look
Was changed to mortal fear.

His heart was broken—crazed his brain:
At once his eye grew wild;
He struggled fiercely with his chain,
Whispered, and wept, and smiled;
Yet wore not long those fatal bands,
And once, at shut of day,
They drew him forth upon the sands,
The foul hyena's prey.

1825

THE GREEK PARTISAN

Our free flag is dancing
In the free mountain air,
And burnished arms are glancing,
And warriors gathering there!
And fearless is the little train
Whose gallant bosoms shield it;
The blood that warms their hearts shall stain
That banner ere they yield it.
—Each dark eye is fixed on earth,
And brief each solemn greeting;
There is no look nor sound of mirth,
Where those stern men are meeting.

They go to the slaughter,
To strike the sudden blow,
And pour on earth, like water,
The best blood of the foe;
To rush on them from rock and height,
And clear the narrow valley,
Or fire their camp at dead of night,
And fly before they rally.
—Chains are round our country pressed,
And cowards have betrayed her,
And we must make her bleeding breast
The grave of the invader.

Not till from her fetters
We raise up Greece again,
And write in bloody letters,
That tyranny is slain,—
Oh, not till then the smile shall steal
Across those darkened faces,
Nor one of all those warriors feel
His children's dear embraces,
—Reap we not the ripened wheat,
Till yonder hosts are flying,
And all their bravest, at our feet,
Like autumn sheaves are lying.

1825

THE EVENING WIND

Spirit that breathest through my lattice, thou
That cool'st the twilight of the sultry day,
Gratefully flows thy freshness round my brow;
Thou hast been out upon the deep at play,
Riding all day the wild blue waves till now,
Roughening their crests, and scattering high their spray,
And swelling the white sail. I welcome thee
To the scorched land, thou wanderer of the sea!

Nor I alone; a thousand bosoms round
Inhale thee in the fulness of delight;
And languid forms rise up, and pulses bound
Livelier, at coming of the wind of night;
And, languishing to hear thy grateful sound,
Lies the vast inland stretched beyond the sight.
Go forth into the gathering shade; go forth,
God's blessing breathed upon the fainting earth!

Go, rock the little wood-bird in his nest,
Curl the still waters, bright with stars, and rouse
The wide old wood from his majestic rest,
Summoning from the innumerable boughs

The strange, deep harmonies that haunt his breast:
Pleasant shall be thy way where meekly bows
The shutting flower, and darkling waters pass,
And where the o'ershadowing branches sweep the grass.

The faint old man shall lean his silver head
To feel thee; thou shalt kiss the child asleep,
And dry the moistened curls that overspread
His temples, while his breathing grows more deep:
And they who stand about the sick man's bed,
Shall joy to listen to thy distant sweep,
And softly part his curtains to allow
Thy visit, grateful to his burning brow.

Go—but the circle of eternal change,
Which is the life of Nature, shall restore,
With sounds and scents from all thy mighty range,
Thee to thy birthplace of the deep once more;
Sweet odors in the sea-air, sweet and strange,
Shall tell the homesick mariner of the shore;
And, listening to thy murmur, he shall deem
He hears the rustling leaf and running stream.

1829

TO THE FRINGED GENTIAN

Thou blossom bright with autumn dew
And colored with the heaven's own blue,
That openest when the quiet light
Succeeds the keen and frosty night—

Thou comest not when violets lean
O'er wandering brooks and springs unseen,
Or columbines, in purple dressed,
Nod o'er the ground-bird's hidden nest.

Thou waitest late and com'st alone,
When woods are bare and birds are flown,
And frosts and shortening days portend
The aged year is near his end.

Then doth thy sweet and quiet eye
Look through its fringes to the sky,
Blue—blue—as if that sky let fall
A flower from its cerulean wall.

I would that thus, when I shall see
The hour of death draw near to me,
Hope, blossoming within my heart,
May look to heaven as I depart.

1829

SONG OF MARION'S MEN

Our band is few but true and tried,
  Our leader frank and bold;
The British soldier trembles
  When Marion's name is told.
Our fortress is the good greenwood,
  Our tent the cypress-tree;
We know the forest round us,
  As seamen know the sea.
We know its walls of thorny vines,
  Its glades of reedy grass,
Its safe and silent islands
  Within the dark morass.

Woe to the English soldiery
  That little dread us near!
On them shall light at midnight
  A strange and sudden fear:
When, waking to their tents on fire,
  They grasp their arms in vain,

And they who stand to face us
  Are beat to earth again;
And they who fly in terror deem
  A mighty host behind,
And hear the tramp of thousands
  Upon the hollow wind.

Then sweet the hour that brings release
  From danger and from toil:
We talk the battle over,
  And share the battle's spoil.
The woodland rings with laugh and shout,
  As if a hunt were up,
And woodland flowers are gathered
  To crown the soldier's cup.
With merry songs we mock the wind
  That in the pine-top grieves,
And slumber long and sweetly
  On beds of oaken leaves.

Well knows the fair and friendly moon
  The band that Marion leads—
The glitter of their rifles,
  The scampering of their steeds.
'Tis life to guide the fiery barb
  Across the moonlit plain;
'Tis life to feel the night-wind
  That lifts his tossing mane.
A moment in the British camp—
  A moment—and away
Back to the pathless forest,
  Before the peep of day.

Grave men there are by broad Santee,
  Grave men with hoary hairs;
Their hearts are all with Marion,
  For Marion are their prayers.

And lovely ladies greet our band
With kindliest welcoming,
With smiles like those of summer,
And tears like those of spring.
For them we wear these trusty arms,
And lay them down no more
Till we have driven the Briton,
Forever, from our shore.

1831

EARTH

A midnight black with clouds is in the sky;
I seem to feel, upon my limbs, the weight
Of its vast brooding shadow. All in vain
Turns the tired eye in search of form; no star
Pierces the pitchy veil; no ruddy blaze,
From dwellings lighted by the cheerful hearth,
Tinges the flowering summits of the grass.
No sound of life is heard, no village hum,
Nor measured tramp of footstep in the path,
Nor rush of wind, while, on the breast of Earth,
I lie and listen to her mighty voice:
A voice of many tones—sent up from streams
That wander through the gloom, from woods unseen
Swayed by the sweeping of the tides of air,
From rocky chasms where darkness dwells all day,
And hollows of the great invisible hills,
And sands that edge the ocean, stretching far
Into the night—a melancholy sound!

O Earth! dost thou too sorrow for the past
Like man thy offspring? Do I hear thee mourn
Thy childhood's unreturning hours, thy springs
Gone with their genial airs and melodies,
The gentle generations of thy flowers,
And thy majestic groves of olden time,

Perished with all their dwellers? Dost thou wail
For that fair age of which the poets tell,
Ere yet the winds grew keen with frost, or fire
Fell with the rains or spouted from the hills,
To blast thy greenness, while the virgin night
Was guiltless and salubrious as the day?
Or haply dost thou grieve for those that die—
For living things that trod thy paths awhile,
The love of thee and heaven—and now they sleep
Mixed with the shapeless dust on which thy herds
Trample and graze? I too must grieve with thee,
O'er loved ones lost. Their graves are far away
Upon thy mountains; yet, while I recline
Alone, in darkness, on thy naked soil,
The mighty nourisher and burial-place
Of man, I feel that I embrace their dust.

Ha! how the murmur deepens! I perceive
And tremble at its dreadful import. Earth
Uplifts a general cry for guilt and wrong,
And heaven is listening. The forgotten graves
Of the heart-broken utter forth their plaint.
The dust of her who loved and was betrayed,
And him who died neglected in his age;
The sepulchres of those who for mankind
Labored, and earned the recompense of scorn;
Ashes of martyrs for the truth, and bones
Of those who, in the strife for liberty,
Were beaten down, their corses given to dogs,
Their names to infamy, all find a voice.
The nook in which the captive, overtoiled,
Lay down to rest at last, and that which holds
Childhood's sweet blossoms, crushed by cruel hands,
Send up a plaintive sound. From battle-fields,
Where heroes madly drave and dashed their hosts
Against each other, rises up a noise,
As if the armèd multitudes of dead

Stirred in their heavy slumber. Mournful tones
Come from the green abysses of the sea—
A story of the crimes the guilty sought
To hide beneath its waves. The glens, the groves,
Paths in the thicket, pools of running brook,
And banks and depths of lake, and streets and lanes
Of cities, now that living sounds are hushed,
Murmur of guilty force and treachery.

Here, where I rest, the vales of Italy
Are round me, populous from early time,
And field of the tremendous warfare waged
'Twixt good and evil. Who, alas! shall dare
Interpret to man's ear the mingled voice
That comes from her old dungeons yawning now
To the black air, her amphitheatres,
Where the dew gathers on the mouldering stones,
And fanes of banished gods, and open tombs,
And roofless palaces, and streets and hearths
Of cities dug from their volcanic graves?
I hear a sound of many languages,
The utterance of nations now no more,
Driven out by mightier, as the days of heaven
Chase one another from the sky. The blood
Of freemen shed by freemen, till strange lords
Came in their hour of weakness, and made fast
The yoke that yet is worn, cries out to Heaven.

What then shall cleanse thy bosom, gentle Earth,
From all its painful memories of guilt?
The whelming flood, or the renewing fire,
Or the slow change of time?—that so, at last,
The horrid tale of perjury and strife,
Murder and spoil, which men call history,
May seem a fable, like the inventions told
By poets of the gods of Greece. O thou,
Who sittest far beyond the Atlantic deep,

Among the sources of thy glorious streams,
My native Land of Groves! a newer page
In the great record of the world is thine;
Shall it be fairer? Fear, and friendly Hope,
And Envy, watch the issue, while the lines,
By which thou shalt be judged, are written down.

1834

THE BATTLE-FIELD

Once this soft turf, this rivulet's sands,
  Were trampled by a hurrying crowd,
And fiery hearts and armèd hands
  Encountered in the battle-cloud.

Ah! never shall the land forget
  How gushed the life-blood of her brave—
Gushed, warm with hope and courage yet,
  Upon the soil they fought to save.

Now all is calm, and fresh, and still;
  Alone the chirp of flitting bird,
And talk of children on the hill,
  And bell of wandering kine, are heard.

No solemn host goes trailing by
  The black-mouthed gun and staggering wain;
Men start not at the battle-cry,
  Oh, be it never heard again!

Soon rested those who fought; but thou
  Who minglest in the harder strife
For truths which men receive not now,
  Thy warfare only ends with life.

A friendless warfare! lingering long
  Through weary day and weary year;
A wild and many-weaponed throng
  Hang on thy front, and flank, and rear.

Yet nerve thy spirit to the proof,
And blench not at thy chosen lot,
The timid good may stand aloof,
The sage may frown—yet faint thou not.

Nor heed the shaft too surely cast,
The foul and hissing bolt of scorn;
For with thy side shall dwell, at last,
The victory of endurance born.

Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again;
Th' eternal years of God are hers;
But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies among his worshippers.

Yea, though thou lie upon the dust,
When they who helped thee flee in fear,
Die full of hope and manly trust,
Like those who fell in battle here.

Another hand thy sword shall wield,
Another hand the standard wave,
Till from the trumpet's mouth is pealed
The blast of triumph o'er thy grave.

1837

THE ANTIQUITY OF FREEDOM

Here are old trees, tall oaks, and gnarlèd pines,
That stream with gray-green mosses; here the ground
Was never trenched by spade, and flowers spring up
Unsown, and die ungathered. It is sweet
To linger here, among the flitting birds
And leaping squirrels, wandering brooks, and winds
That shake the leaves, and scatter, as they pass,
A fragrance from the cedars, thickly set

With pale-blue berries. In these peaceful shades—
Peaceful, unpruned, immeasurably old—
My thoughts go up the long dim path of years,
Back to the earliest days of liberty.

O Freedom! thou art not, as poets dream,
A fair young girl, with light and delicate limbs,
And wavy tresses gushing from the cap
With which the Roman master crowned his slave
When he took off the gyves. A bearded man,
Armed to the teeth, art thou; one mailèd hand
Grasps the broad shield, and one the sword; thy brow,
Glorious in beauty though it be, is scarred
With tokens of old wars; thy massive limbs
Are strong with struggling. Power at thee has launched
His bolts, and with his lightnings smitten thee;
They could not quench the life thou hast from heaven;
Mercilous Power has dug thy dungeon deep,
And his swart armorers, by a thousand fires,
Have forged thy chain; yet, while he deems thee bound,
The links are shivered, and the prison-walls
Fall outward; terribly thou springest forth,
As springs the flame above a burning pile,
Aud shoutest to the nations, who return
Thy shoutings, while the pale oppressor flies.

Thy birthright was not given by human hands:
Thou wert twin-born with man. In pleasant fields,
While yet our race was few, thou sat'st with him,
To tend the quiet flock and watch the stars,
And teach the reed to utter simple airs.
Thou by his side, amid the tangled wood,
Didst war upon the panther and the wolf,
His only foes; and thou with him didst draw
The earliest furrow on the mountain-side,
Soft with the deluge. Tyranny himself,
Thy enemy, although of reverend look,

Hoary with many years, and far obeyed,
Is later born than thou; and as he meets
The grave defiance of thine elder eye,
The usurper trembles in his fastnesses.

Thou shalt wax stronger with the lapse of years,
But he shall fade into a feebler age—
Feebler, yet subtler. He shall weave his snares,
And spring them on thy careless steps, and clap
His withered hands, and from their ambush call
His hordes to fall upon thee. He shall send
Quaint maskers, wearing fair and gallant forms
To catch thy gaze, and uttering graceful words
To charm thy ear; while his sly imps, by stealth,
Twine round thee threads of steel, light thread on thread,
That grow to fetters; or bind down thy arms
With chains concealed in chaplets. Oh! not yet
Mayst thou unbrace thy corslet, nor lay by
Thy sword; nor yet, O Freedom! close thy lids,
In slumber; for thine enemy never sleeps,
And thou must watch and combat till the day
Of the new earth and heaven. But wouldst thou rest
Awhile from tumult and the frauds of men,
These old and friendly solitudes invite
Thy visit. They, while yet the forest-trees
Were young upon the unviolated earth,
And yet the moss-stains on the rock were new,
Beheld thy glorious childhood, and rejoiced.

1842

"OH MOTHER OF A MIGHTY RACE"

Oh mother of a mighty race,
Yet lovely in thy youthful grace!
The elder dames, thy haughty peers,
Admire and hate thy blooming years.
With words of shame
And taunts of scorn they join thy name.

For on thy cheeks the glow is spread
That tints thy morning hills with red;
Thy step—the wild-deer's rustling feet
Within thy woods are not more fleet;
Thy hopeful eye
Is bright as thine own sunny sky.

Ay, let them rail—those haughty ones,
While safe thou dwellest with thy sons.
They do not know how loved thou art,
How many a fond and fearless heart
Would rise to throw
Its life between thee and the foe.

They know not, in their hate and pride,
What virtues with thy children bide;
How true, how good, thy graceful maids
Make bright, like flowers, the valley-shades;
What generous men
Spring, like thine oaks, by hill and glen.

What cordial welcomes greet the guest
By thy lone rivers of the West;
How faith is kept, and truth revered,
And man is loved, and God is feared,
In woodland homes,
And where the ocean-border foams.

There's freedom at thy gates and rest
For Earth's down-trodden and opprest,
A shelter for the hunted head,
For the starved laborer toil and bread.
Power, at thy bounds,
Stops and calls back his baffled hounds.

Oh, fair young mother! on thy brow
Shall sit a nobler grace than now.
Deep in the brightness of thy skies
The thronging years in glory rise,
And, as they fleet,
Drop strength and riches at thy feet.

Thine eye, with every coming hour,
Shall brighten, and thy form shall tower;
And when thy sisters, elder born,
Would brand thy name with words of scorn,
Before thine eye,
Upon their lips the taunt shall die.

1846

ITALY

Voices from the mountains speak,
Apennines to Alps reply;
Vale to vale and peak to peak
Toss an old-remembered cry:
"Italy
Shall be free!"
Such the mighty shout that fills
All the passes of her hills.

All the old Italian lakes
Quiver at that quickening word;
Como with a thrill awakes;
Garda to her depths is stirred;

Mid the steeps
Where he sleeps,
Dreaming of the elder years,
Startled Thrasymenus hears.

Sweeping Arno, swelling Po,
Murmur freedom to their meads.
Tiber swift and Liris slow
Send strange whispers from their reeds.
"Italy
Shall be free!"
Sing the glittering brooks that slide,
Toward the sea, from Etna's side.

Long ago was Gracchus slain;
Brutus perished long ago;
Yet the living roots remain
Whence the shoots of greatness grow,
Yet again,
Godlike men,
Sprung from that heroic stem,
Call the land to rise with them.

They who haunt the swarming street,
They who chase the mountain-boar,
Or, where cliff and billow meet,
Prune the vine or pull the oar,
With a stroke
Break their yoke;
Slaves but yestereve were they—
Freemen with the dawning day.

Looking in his children's eyes,
While his own with gladness flash,
"These," the Umbrian father cries,
"Ne'er shall crouch beneath the lash!

These shall ne'er
Brook to wear
Chains whose cruel links are twined
Round the crushed and withering mind."

Monarchs! ye whose armies stand
Harnessed for the battle-field!
Pause, and from the lifted hand
Drop the bolts of war ye wield.
Stand aloof
While the proof
Of the people's might is given;
Leave their kings to them and Heaven!

Stand aloof, and see the oppressed
Chase the oppressor, pale with fear,
As the fresh winds of the west
Blow the misty valleys clear.
Stand and see
Italy
Cast the gyves she wears no more
To the gulfs that steep her shore.

1860

OUR COUNTRY'S CALL

Lay down the axe; fling by the spade;
Leave in its track the toiling plough;
The rifle and the bayonet-blade
For arms like yours were fitter now;
And let the hands that ply the pen
Quit the light task, and learn to wield
The horseman's crooked brand, and rein
The charger on the battle-field.

Our country calls; away! away!
To where the blood-stream blots the green.
Strike to defend the gentlest sway
That Time in all his course has seen.
See, from a thousand coverts—see,
Spring the armed foes that haunt her track;
They rush to smite her down, and we
Must beat the banded traitors back.

Ho! sturdy as the oaks ye cleave,
And moved as soon to fear and flight,
Men of the glade and forest! leave
Your woodcraft for the field of fight.
The arms that wield the axe must pour
An iron tempest on the foe;
His serried ranks shall reel before
The arm that lays the panther low.

And ye, who breast the mountain-storm
By grassy steep or highland lake,
Come, for the land ye love, to form
A bulwark that no foe can break.
Stand, like your own gray cliffs that mock
The whirlwind, stand in her defence;
The blast as soon shall move the rock
As rushing squadrons bear ye thence.

And ye, whose homes are by her grand
Swift rivers, rising far away,
Come from the depth of her green land,
As mighty in your march as they;
As terrible as when the rains
Have swelled them over bank and bourne,
With sudden floods to drown the plains
And sweep along the woods uptorn.

And ye, who throng, beside the deep,
Her ports and hamlets of the strand,
In number like the waves that leap
On his long-murmuring marge of sand—
Come like that deep, when, o'er his brim,
He rises, all his floods to pour,
And flings the proudest barks that swim,
A helpless wreck, against his shore!

Few, few were they whose swords of old
Won the fair land in which we dwell;
But we are many, we who hold
The grim resolve to guard it well.
Strike, for that broad and goodly land,
Blow after blow, till men shall see
That Might and Right move hand in hand,
And glorious must their triumph be!

1861

THE POET

Thou, who wouldst wear the name
Of poet mid thy brethren of mankind,
And clothe in words of flame
Thoughts that shall live within the general mind!
Deem not the framing of a deathless lay
The pastime of a drowsy summer day.

But gather all thy powers,
And wreak them on the verse that thou dost weave,
And in thy lonely hours,
At silent morning or at wakeful eve,
While the warm current tingles through thy veins,
Set forth the burning words in fluent strains.

No smooth array of phrase,
  Artfully sought and ordered though it be,
Which the cold rhymer lays
  Upon his page with languid industry,
Can wake the listless pulse to livelier speed,
Or fill with sudden tears the eyes that read.

The secret wouldst thou know
  To touch the heart or fire the blood at will?
Let thine own eyes o'erflow;
  Let thy lips quiver with the passionate thrill;
Seize the great thought, ere yet its power be past,
And bind, in words, the fleet emotion fast.

Then, should thy verse appear
  Halting and harsh, and all unaptly wrought,
Touch the crude line with fear,
  Save in the moment of impassioned thought;
Then summon back the original glow, and mend
The strain with rapture that with fire was penned.

Yet let no empty gust
  Of passion find an utterance in thy lay,
A blast that whirls the dust
    Along the howling street and dies away;
But feelings of calm power and mighty sweep,
Like currents journeying through the windless deep.

Seek'st thou, in living lays,
  To limn the beauty of the earth and sky?
Before thine inner gaze
  Let all that beauty in clear vision lie;
Look on it with exceeding love, and write
The words inspired by wonder and delight.

Of tempests wouldst thou sing,
  Or tell of battles—make thyself a part
Of the great tumult; cling
  To the tossed wreck with terror in thy heart;
Scale, with the assaulting host, the rampart's height,
And strike and struggle in the thickest fight.

So shalt thou frame a lay
  That haply may endure from age to age,
And they who read shall say:
  "What witchery hangs upon this poet's page!
What art is his the written spells to find
That sway from mood to mood the willing mind!"

1863

THE DEATH OF LINCOLN

Oh, slow to smite and swift to spare,
  Gentle and merciful and just!
Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
  The sword of power, a nation's trust!

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
  Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak the anguish of a land
  That shook with horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done; the bond are free:
  We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose proudest monument shall be
  The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life; its bloody close
  Hath placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those
  Who perished in the cause of Right.

1865

THE DEATH OF SLAVERY

O thou great Wrong, that, through the slow-paced years,
  Didst hold thy millions fettered, and didst wield
  The scourge that drove the laborer to the field,
And turn a stony gaze on human tears,
    Thy cruel reign is o'er;
    Thy bondmen crouch no more
In terror at the menace of thine eye;
  For He who marks the bounds of guilty power,
Long-suffering, hath heard the captive's cry,
  And touched his shackles at the appointed hour,
And lo! they fall, and he whose limbs they galled
Stands in his native manhood, disenthralled.

A shout of joy from the redeemed is sent;
  Ten thousand hamlets swell the hymn of thanks;
  Our rivers roll exulting, and their banks
Send up hosannas to the firmament!
    Fields where the bondman's toil
    No more shall trench the soil,
Seem now to bask in a serener day;
  The meadow-birds sing sweeter, and the airs
Of heaven with more caressing softness play,
  Welcoming man to liberty like theirs.
A glory clothes the land from sea to sea,
For the great land and all its coasts are free.

Within that land wert thou enthroned of late,
  And they by whom the nation's laws were made,
  And they who filled its judgment-seats obeyed
Thy mandate, rigid as the will of Fate.
    Fierce men at thy right hand,
    With gesture of command,
Gave forth the word that none might dare gainsay;
  And grave and reverend ones, who loved thee not,

Shrank from thy presence, and in blank dismay
Choked down, unuttered, the rebellious thought;
While meaner cowards, mingling with thy train,
Proved, from the book of God, thy right to reign.

Great as thou wert, and feared from shore to shore,
The wrath of Heaven o'ertook thee in thy pride;
Thou sitt'st a ghastly shadow; by thy side
Thy once strong arms hang nerveless evermore.
And they who quailed but now
Before thy lowering brow,
Devote thy memory to scorn and shame,
And scoff at the pale, powerless thing thou art.
And they who ruled in thine imperial name,
Subdued, and standing sullenly apart,
Scowl at the hands that overthrew thy reign,
And shattered at a blow the prisoner's chain.

Well was thy doom deserved; thou didst not spare
Life's tenderest ties, but cruelly didst part
Husband and wife, and from the mother's heart
Didst wrest her children, deaf to shriek and prayer;
Thy inner lair became
The haunt of guilty shame;
Thy lash dropped blood; the murderer, at thy side,
Showed his red hands, nor feared the vengeance due.
Thou didst sow earth with crimes, and, far and wide,
A harvest of uncounted miseries grew,
Until the measure of thy sins at last
Was full, and then the avenging bolt was cast!

Go now, accursed of God, and take thy place
With hateful memories of the elder time,
With many a wasting plague, and nameless crime,
And bloody war that thinned the human race;
With the Black Death, whose way
Through wailing cities lay,

Worship of Moloch, tyrannies that built
The Pyramids, and cruel creeds that taught
To avenge a fancied guilt by deeper guilt—
Death at the stake to those that held them not.
Lo! the foul phantoms, silent in the gloom
Of the flown ages, part to yield thee room.

I see the better years that hasten by
Carry thee back into that shadowy past,
Where, in the dusty spaces, void and vast,
The graves of those whom thou hast murdered lie.
The slave-pen, through whose door
Thy victims pass no more,
Is there, and there shall the grim block remain
At which the slave was sold; while at thy feet
Scourges and engines of restraint and pain
Moulder and rust by thine eternal seat.
There, mid the symbols that proclaim thy crimes,
Dwell thou, a warning to the coming times.

1866

THE NOVELIST IN AMERICA

It has been objected, that the habits of our countrymen are too active and practical; that they are too universally and continually engrossed by the cares and occupations of business to have leisure for that intrigue, those plottings and counter plottings, which are necessary to give a sufficient degree of action and eventfulness to the novel of real life. It is said that we need for this purpose a class of men, whose condition in life places them above the necessity of active exertion, and who are driven to the practice of intrigue, because they have nothing else to do. It remains, however, to be proved that any considerable portion of this ingredient is necessary in the composition of a successful novel.

To require that it should be made up of nothing better than the manœuvres of those, whose only employment is to glitter at places of public resort, to follow a perpetual round of amusements, and to form plans to outshine, thwart, and vex each other, is confining the writer to a narrow and most barren circle. It is requiring an undue proportion of heartlessness, selfishness, and vice in his pictures of society. It is compelling him to go out of the wholesome atmosphere of those classes, where the passions and affections have their most salutary and natural play, and employ his observations on that where they are most perverted, sophisticated, and corrupt.

But will it be seriously contended, that he can have no other resource but the rivalries and machinations of the idle, the frivolous, and the dissolute, to keep the reader from yawning over his pictures? Will it be urged that no striking and interesting incidents can come to pass without their miserable aid? If our country be not the country of intrigue, it is at least the country of enterprise; and nowhere are the great objects that

worthily interest the passions, and call forth the exertions of men, pursued with more devotion and perseverance....

But the truth is, that the distinctions of rank, and the amusements of elegant idleness, are but the surface of society, and only so many splendid disguises put upon the reality of things. They are trappings which the writer of real genius, the anatomist of the human heart, strips away when he would exhibit his characters as they are, and engage our interest for them as beings of our own species. He reduces them to the same great level where distinctions of rank are nothing, and difference of character everything. It is here that James First and Charles Second and Louis Ninth and Rob Roy, and Jeanie Deans, and Meg Merrilies are, by the great author of the Waverly Novels, made to meet. The monarch must come down from the dim elevation of his throne, he must lay aside the assumed and conventional manners of his station, and unbend and unbosom himself with his confidants, before that illustrious master will condescend to describe him. In the artificial sphere in which the great move, they are only puppets and pageants, but here they are men.

A narrative, the scene of which is laid at the magnificent levees of princes, in the drawing rooms of nobles, and the bright assemblies of fashion, may be a very pretty, showy sort of thing, and so may a story of the glittering dances and pranks of fairies. But we soon grow weary of all this, and ask for objects of sympathy and regard, for something the recollection of which shall dwell on the heart, and to which it will love to recur; for something, in short, which is natural, the uneffaced traits of strength and weakness, of the tender and the comic, all which the pride of rank either removes from observation or obliterates.

If these things have any value, we hesitate not to say, that they are to be found abundantly in the characters of our countrymen, formed as they are under the influence of our free institutions, and shooting into a large and vigorous, though sometimes irregular luxuriance. They exist most abundantly in our more ancient settlements, and amidst the more homogeneous

races of our large populations, where the causes that produce them have operated longest and with most activity. It is there that the human mind has learned best to enjoy our fortunate and equal institutions, and to profit by them. In the countries of Europe the laws chain men down to the condition in which they were born. This observation, of course, is not equally true of all those countries, but when they are brought into comparison with ours, it is in some degree applicable to them all. Men spring up, and vegetate, and die without thinking of passing from the sphere in which they find themselves any more than the plants they cultivate think of removing from the places where they are rooted. It is the tendency of this rigid and melancholy destiny to contract and stint the intellectual faculties, to prevent the development of character, and to make the subjects of it timid, irresolute, and imbecile.

With us, on the contrary, where the proudest honors in the state, and the highest deference in society, are set equally before all our citizens, a wholesome and quickening impulse is communicated to all parts of the social system. All are possessed with a spirit of ambition and a love of adventure, an intense competition calls forth and exalts the passions and faculties of men, their characters become strongly defined, their minds acquire a hardihood and activity which can be gained by no other discipline, and the community, throughout all its conditions, is full of bustle, and change, and action.

Whoever will take the pains to pursue this subject a little into its particulars, will be surprised at the infinite variety of forms of character, which spring up under the institutions of our country. Religion is admitted on all hands to be a mighty agent in moulding the human character; and accordingly, with the perfect allowance and toleration of all religions, we see among us their innumerable and diverse influences upon the manners and temper of our people. Whatever may be his religious opinions, no one is restrained by fear of consequences from avowing them, but is left to nurse his peculiarities of doctrine into what importance he pleases.

It is in our country also, that these differences of character,

which grow naturally out of geographical situation, are least tampered with and repressed by political regulations. The adventurous and roving natives of our seacoast and islands, are a different race of men from those who till the interior, and the hardy dwellers of our mountainous districts are not like the inhabitants of the rich plains, that skirt our mighty lakes and rivers. The manners of the northern states are said to be characterised by the keenness and importunity of their climate, and those of the southern to partake of the softness of theirs. In our cities you will see the polished manners of the European capitals, but pass into the more quiet and unvisited parts of the country, and you will find men, whom you might take for the first planters of our colonies. The descendants of the Hollanders have not forgotten the traditions of their fathers, and the legends of Germany are still recited, and the ballads of Scotland still sung, in settlements whose inhabitants derive their origin from those countries. It is hardly possible that the rapid and continual growth and improvement of our country, a circumstance wonderfully exciting to the imagination, and altogether unlike anything witnessed in other countries, should not have some influence in forming our national character. At all events, it is a most fertile source of incident. It does for us in a few short years, what, in Europe, is the work of centuries. The hardy and sagacious native of the eastern states, settles himself in the wilderness by the side of the emigrant from British Isles; the pestilence of the marshes is braved and overcome; the bear, and wolf and catamount are chased from their haunts; and then you see cornfields and roads and towns springing up as if by enchantment. In the meantime pleasant Indian villages, situated on the skirts of their hunting grounds, with their beautiful green plats for dances and martial exercises, are taken into the bosom of our extending population, while new states are settled and cities founded far beyond them. Thus a great deal of history is crowded into a brief space. Each little hamlet, in a few seasons has more events and changes to tell of, than a European village can furnish in a course of ages.

But, if the writer of fictitious history does not find all the variety he wishes in the various kinds of our population, descended, in different parts of our country, from ancestors of different nations, and yet preserving innumerable and indubitable tokens of their origin, if the freedom with which every man is suffered to take his own way, in all things not affecting the peace and good order of society, does not furnish him with a sufficient diversity of characters, employments, and modes of life, he has yet other resources. He may bring into his plots men, whose characters and manners were formed by the institutions and modes of society in the nations beyond the Atlantic, and he may describe them faithfully, as things which he has observed and studied. If he is not satisfied with indigenous virtue, he may take for the model of his characters men of whom the old world is not worthy, and whom it has cast out from its bosom. If domestic villany be not dark enough for his pictures, here are fugitives from the justice of Europe come to prowl in America. If the coxcombs of our own country are not sufficiently exquisite, affected, and absurd, here are plenty of silken fops from the capitals of foreign kingdoms. If he finds himself in need of a class of men more stupid and degraded than are to be found among the natives of the United States, here are crowds of the wretched peasantry of Great Britain and Germany, flying for refuge from intolerable suffering, in every vessel that comes to our shores. Hither also resort numbers of that order of men who, in foreign countries, are called the middling class, the most valuable art of the communities they leave, to enjoy a moderate affluence, where the abuses and exactions of a distempered system of government cannot reach them, to degrade them to the condition of the peasantry. Our country is the asylum of the persecuted preachers of new religions, and the teachers of political doctrines, which Europe will not endure; a sanctuary for dethroned princes, and the consorts of slain emperors. When we consider all these innumerable differences of character, native and foreign, this infinite variety of pursuits and objects, this endless diversity and change of fortunes, and behold them gathered

and grouped into one vast assemblage in our own country, we shall feel little pride in the sagacity or the skill of that native author, who asks for a richer or a wider field of observation. . . .

1825

POETRY IN ITS RELATION TO OUR AGE AND COUNTRY

An opinion prevails, which neither wants the support of respectable names nor of plausible reasonings, that the art of poetry, in common with its sister arts, painting and sculpture, cannot in the present age be cultivated with the same degree of success as formerly. It has been supposed that the progress of reason, of science, and of the useful arts has a tendency to narrow the sphere of the imagination, and to repress the enthusiasm of the affections. Poetry, it is alleged, whose office it was to nurse the infancy of the human race, and to give it its first lessons of wisdom, having fulfilled the part to which she was appointed, now resigns her charge to severer instructors. Others, again, refining upon this idea, maintain that not only the age in which we live must fail to produce anything to rival the productions of the ancient masters of song, but that our own country, of all parts of the globe, is likely to remain the most distant from such a distinction.

Our citizens are held to possess, in a remarkable degree, the heedful, calculating, prosaic spirit of the age, while our country is decried as peculiarly barren of the materials of poetry. The scenery of our land these reasoners admit to be beautiful, but they urge that it is the beauty of a face without expression; that it wants the associations of tradition which are the soul and interest of scenery; that it wants the national superstitions which linger yet in every district in Europe, and the legends of distant and dark ages and of wild and unsettled times of which the old world reminds you at every step. Nor can our country, they say, ever be more fruitful of these materials than at

present. For this is not an age to give birth to new superstitions, but to explode and root out old, however harmless and agreeable they may be, while half the world is already wondering how little the other half will finally believe. Is it likely, then, that a multitude of interesting traditions will spring up in our land to ally themselves with every mountain, every hill, every forest, every river, and every tributary brook? There may be some passages of our early history which associate themselves with particular places, but the argument is that the number of these will never be greatly augmented. The genius of our nation is quiet and commercial. Our people are too much in love with peace and gain, the state of society is too settled, and the laws too well enforced and respected, to allow of wild and strange adventures. There is no romance either in our character, our history, or our condition of society; and, therefore, it is neither likely to encourage poetry, nor capable of supplying it with those materials—materials drawn from domestic traditions and manners—which render it popular.

If these views of the tendency of the present age, and the state of things in our own country, are to be received as true, it must be acknowledged that they are not only exceedingly discouraging to those who make national literature a matter of pride, but, what is worse, that they go far toward causing that very inferiority on which they so strongly insist. Not that there is any danger that the demand for contemporary poetry will entirely cease. Verses have always been, and always will be written, and will always find readers; but it is of some consequence that they should be good verses, that they should exert the healthful and beneficial influences which I consider as belonging to the highest productions of the art; not feebly and imperfectly, but fully and effectually....

It is especially the privilege of an age which has no engrossing superstitions of its own, to make use in its poetry of those of past ages; to levy contributions from the credulity of all time, and thus to diversify indefinitely the situations in which its human agents are placed. If these materials are managed with sufficient skill to win the temporary assent of the reader to the

probability of the supernatural circumstances related, the purpose of the poet is answered. This is precisely the condition of the present age; it has the advantage over all ages that have preceded it in the abundance of those collected materials, and its poets have not been slow to avail themselves of their aid.

In regard to the circumstances which are thought in the present age to repress and limit the exercise of the poetical faculty, the principal if not the only one is supposed to be the prevalence of studies and pursuits unfavorable to the cultivation of the imagination and to enthusiasm of feeling. True it is that there are studies and pursuits which principally call into exercise other faculties of the mind, and that they are competitors with Poetry for the favor of the public. But it is not certain that the patronage bestowed on them would be extended to her, even if they should cease to exist. Nay, there is strong reason to suppose that they have done something to extend her influence, for they have certainly multiplied the number of readers, and everybody who reads at all sometimes reads poetry, and generally professes to admire what the best judges pronounce excellent, and, perhaps, in time come to enjoy it. Various inclinations continue, as heretofore, to impel one individual to one pursuit, and another to another—one to chemistry and another to poetry—yet I cannot see that their different labors interfere with each other, or that, because the chemist prosecutes his science successfully, therefore the poet should lose his inspiration. Take the example of Great Britain. In no country are the sciences studied with greater success, yet in no country is poetry pursued with more ardor. Spring and autumn reign hand in hand in her literature; it is loaded at once with blossoms and fruits. Does the poetry of that island of the present day—the poetry of Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge, Byron, Southey, Shelley, and others—smack of the chilling tendencies of the physical sciences? Or, rather, is it not bold, varied, impassioned, irregular, and impatient of precise laws, beyond that of any former age? Indeed, has it not the freshness, the vigor, and perhaps also the disorder, of a new literature?

The amount of knowledge necessary to be possessed by all who would keep pace with the age, as much greater as it is than formerly, is not, I apprehend, in danger of oppressing and smothering poetical talent. Knowledge is the material with which Genius builds her fabrics. The greater its abundance, the more power is required to dispose it into order and beauty, but the more vast and magnificent will be the structure. All great poets have been men of great knowledge. Some have gathered it from books, as Spencer and Milton; others from keen observation of men and things, as Homer and Shakespeare. On the other hand, the poetry of Ossian, whether genuine or not, is an instance of no inconsiderable poetical talent struggling with the disadvantages of a want of knowledge. It is this want which renders it so singularly monotonous. The poverty of the poet's ideas confined his mind to a narrow circle, and his poems are a series of changes rung upon a few thoughts and a few images. Single passages are beautiful and affecting, but each poem, as a whole, is tiresome and uninteresting.

I come, in the last place, to consider the question of our own expectations in literature, and the probability of our producing in the new world anything to rival the immortal poems of the old. Many of the remarks already made on the literary spirit of the present age will apply also to this part of the subject. Indeed, in this point of view, we should do ill to despair of our country, at least until the lapse of many years shall seem to have settled the question against us. Where the fountains of knowledge are by the roadside, and where the volumes from which poetic enthusiasms are caught and fed are in everybody's hands, it would be singularly strange if, amid the multitude of pursuits which occupy our citizens, nobody should think of taking verse as a path to fame. Yet, if it shall be chosen and pursued with the characteristic ardor of our countrymen, what can prevent its being brought to the same degree of perfection here as in other countries? Not the want of encouragement surely, for the literary man needs but little to stimulate his exertions, and with that little his exertions are undoubtedly greater. Who would think of fattening a race-horse? Com-

plaints of the poverty of poets are as old as their art, but I never heard that they wrote the worse verses for it. It is enough, probably, to call forth their most vigorous efforts, that poetry is admired and honored by their countrymen. With respect to the paucity of national traditions, it will be time to complain of it when all those of which we are possessed are exhausted. Besides, as I have already shown, it is the privilege of poets, when they suppose themselves in need of materials, to seek them in other countries. The best English poets have done this. The events of Spenser's celebrated poem take place within the shadowy limits of fairy-land. Shakespeare has laid the scene of many of his finest tragedies in foreign countries. Milton went out of the world for the subject of his two epics. Byron has taken the incidents of all his poems from outside of England. Southey's best work is a poem of Spain—of chivalry, and of the Roman Church. For the story of one of his narrative poems, Moore went to Persia; for that of another, to the antediluvian world. Wordsworth and Crabbe, each in a different way, and each with great power, abjuring all heroic traditions and recollections, and all aid from the supernatural and the marvellous, have drawn their subjects from modern manners and the simple occurrences of common life. Are they read, for that reason, with any the less avidity by the multitudes who resort to their pages for pastime, for edification, for solace, for noble joy, and for the ecstasies of pure delight?

It has been urged by some, as an obstacle to the growth of elegant literature among us, that our language is a transplanted one, framed for a country and for institutions different from ours, and, therefore, not likely to be wielded by us with such force, effect, and grace, as it would have been if it had grown up with our nation, and received its forms and its accessions from the exigencies of our experience. It seems to me that this is one of the most unsubstantial of all the brood of phantoms which have been conjured up to alarm us. Let those who press this opinion descend to particulars. Let them point out the peculiar defects of our language in its application to our natural and political situation. Let them show in what respects it

refuses to accommodate itself easily and gracefully to all the wants of expression that are felt among us. Till they do this, let us be satified that the copious and flexible dialect we speak is as equally proper to be used at the equator as at the poles, and at any intermediate latitude; and alike in monarchies or republics. It has grown up, as every forcible and beautiful language has done, among a simple and unlettered people; it has accommodated itself, in the first place, to the things of nature, and, as civilization advanced, to the things of art; and thus it has become a language full of picturesque forms of expression, yet fitted for the purposes of science. If a new language were to arise among us in our present condition of society, I fear that it would derive too many of its words from the roots used to signify canals, railroads, and steam-boats—things which, however well thought of at present, may perhaps a century hence be superseded by still more ingenious inventions. To try this notion about a transplanted dialect, imagine one of the great living poets of England emigrated to this country. Can anybody be simple enough to suppose that his poetry would be the worse for it?

I infer, then, that all the materials of poetry exist in our own country, with all the ordinary encouragements and opportunities for making a successful use of them. The elements of beauty and grandeur, intellectual greatness and moral truth, the stormy and the gentle passions, the casualties and the changes of life, and the light shed upon man's nature by the story of past times and the knowledge of foreign manners, have not made their sole abode in the old world beyond the waters. If under these circumstances our poetry should finally fail of rivalling that of Europe, it will be because Genius sits idle in the midst of its treasures.

1825-26

THE RIGHT OF WORKMEN TO STRIKE

Sentence was passed on Saturday on the twenty "men who had determined not to work." The punishment selected, on due consideration, by the judge, was that officers appointed for the purpose should immediately demand from each of the delinquents a sum of money which was named in the sentence of the court. The amount demanded would not have fallen short of the savings of many years. Either the offenders had not parted with these savings, or their brother workmen raised the ransom money for them on the spot. The fine was paid over as required. All is now well; justice has been satisfied. But if the expenses of their families had anticipated the law, and left nothing in their hands, or if friends had not been ready to buy the freedom of their comrades, they would have been sent to prison, and there they would have staid, until their wives and children, besides earning their own bread, had saved enough to redeem the captives from their cells. Such has been their punishment. What was their offence? They had committed the crime of unanimously declining to go to work at the wages offered to them by their masters. They had said to one another, "Let us come out from the meanness and misery of our caste. Let us begin to do what every order more privileged and more honoured is doing everyday. By the means which we believe to be the best let us raise ourselves and our families above the humbleness of our condition. We may be wrong, but we cannot help believing that we might do much if we were true brothers to each other, and would resolve not to sell the only thing which is our own, the cunning of our hands, for less than it is worth." What other things they may have done is nothing to the purpose: it was for this they were condemned; it is for this they are to endure the penalty of the law.

We call upon a candid and generous community to mark that the punishment inflicted upon these twenty "men who had determined not to work" is not directed against the offence of conspiring to prevent others by force from working at low

wages, but expressly against the offence of settling by preconcert the compensation which they thought they were entitled to obtain. It is certainly superfluous to repeat, that this journal would be the very last to oppose a law levelled at any attempt to molest the labourer who chooses to work for less than the prices settled by the union. We have said, and to cut off cavil, we say it now again, that a conspiracy to deter, by threats of violence, a fellow workman from arranging his own terms with his employers, is a conspiracy to commit a felony—a conspiracy which, being a crime against liberty, we should be the first to condemn—a conspiracy which no strike should, for its own sake, countenance for a moment—a conspiracy already punishable by the statute, and far easier to reach than the one of which "the twenty" stood accused; but a conspiracy, we must add, that has not a single feature in common with the base and barbarous prohibition under which the offenders were indicted and condemned.

They were condemned because they had determined not to work for the wages that were offered them! Can any thing be imagined more abhorrent to every sentiment of generosity or justice, than the law which arms the rich with the legal right to fix, by assize, the wages of the poor? If this is not SLAVERY, we have forgotten its definition. Strike the right of associating for the sale of labour from the privileges of a freeman, and you may as well at once bind him to a master, or ascribe him to the soil. If it be not in the colour of his skin, and in the poor franchise of naming his own terms in a contract for his work, what advantage has the labourer of the north over the bondman of the south? Punish by human laws a "determination not to work," make it penal by any other penalty than idleness inflicts, and it matters little whether the task-masters be one or many, an individual or an order, the hateful scheme of slavery will have gained a foothold in the land. And then the meanness of this law, which visits with its malice those who cling to it for protection, and shelters with all its fences those who are raised above its threats. A late solicitation for its aid against employers, is treated with derision and contempt, but the moment the

"masters" invoked its intervention, it came down from its high place with most indecent haste, and has now discharged its fury upon the naked heads of wretches so forlorn, that their worst faults multiply their titles to a liberty which they must learn to win from livelier sensibilities than the barren benevolence of Wealth, or the tardy magnanimity of Power....

"Self-created societies," says Judge Edwards, "are unknown to the constitution and laws, and will not be permitted to rear their crest and extend their baneful influence over any portion of the community." If there is any sense in this passage it means that self-created societies are unlawful, and must be put down by the courts. Down then with every literary, every religious, and every charitable association not incorporated! What nonsense is this! Self-created societies *are* known to the constitution and laws, for they are not prohibited, and the laws which allow them will, if justly administered, protect them. But suppose in charity that the reporter has put this absurdity into the mouth of Judge Edwards, and that he meant only those self-created societies which have an effect upon trade and commerce. Gather up then and sweep to the penitentiary all those who are confederated to carry on any business or trade in concert, by fixed rules, and see how many men you would leave at large in this city. The members of every partnership in the place will come under the penalties of the law, and not only these, but every person pursuing any occupation whatever, who governs himself by a mutual understanding with others that follow the same occupation....

1836

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

....Who then are the men that issue this invitation to silence the press by violence? Who but an insolent brawling minority, a few noisy fanatics who claim that their own opinions shall be the measure of freedom for the rest of the community, and who undertake to overawe a vast pacific majority by threats of wanton outrage and plunder? These

men are for erecting an oligarchy of their own and riding rough shod over the people and the people's rights. They claim a right to repeal the laws established by the majority in favor of the freedom of the press. They make new laws of their own to which they require that the rest of the community shall submit, and in case of a refusal, they threaten to execute them by the ministry of a mob. There is no tyranny or oppression exercised in any part of the world more absolute or more frightful than that which they would establish.

So far as we are concerned we are determined that this despotism shall neither be submitted to nor encouraged. In whatever form it makes its appearance we shall raise our voice against it. We are resolved that the subject of slavery shall be as it ever has been, as free a subject of discussion and argument and declamation, as the difference between whiggism and democracy, or as the difference between the Arminians and the Calvinists. If the press chooses to be silent on the subject it shall be the silence of perfect free will, and not the silence of fear. We hold that this combination of the few to govern the many by the terror of illegal violence, is as wicked and indefensible as a conspiracy to rob on the highway. We hold it to be the duty of good citizens to protest against it whenever and wherever it shows itself, and to resist it if necessary to the death.

One piece of justice must be done to the South. Thousands there are of persons in that quarter of the country who disapprove, as heartily as any citizen of the North can do, the employment of violence against the presses or the preachers of the anti-slavery party. There are great numbers also, as we are well informed, who think that only harm could result from directing the penalties of the law against those who discuss the question of slavery. They are for leaving the mode of discussing this question solely to the calm and considerate good sense of the North, satisfied that the least show of a determination to abridge the liberty of speech in this matter is but throwing oil on the flames.

1836

THE MURDER OF LOVEJOY

We have received by this morning's mail a slip from the Missouri Argus, printed at St. Louis, containing intelligence which has filled us with surprise and horror. A mob, in making an attack upon an abolition press established at Alton, in Illinois, murdered two persons, wounded several others, and triumphing over the objects of their fury by this atrocious violence, destroyed the press which these men had defended at the cost of their blood and their lives.

We give the slip from the Missouri Argus as we received it, but we cannot forbear expressing in the strongest language our condemnation of the manner in which it speaks of this bloody event. The right to discuss freely and openly, by speech, by the pen, by the press, all political questions, and to examine and animadvert upon all political institutions, is a right so clear and certain, so interwoven with our other liberties, so necessary, in fact, to their existence, that without it we must fall at once into despotism or anarchy. To say that he who holds unpopular opinions must hold them at the peril of his life, and that, if he expresses them in public, he has only himself to blame if they who disagree with him should rise and put him to death, is to strike at all rights, all liberties, all protection of law, and to justify or extenuate all crimes.

We regard not this as a question connected with the abolition of slavery in the South, but as a question vital to the liberties of the entire Union. We may have different opinions concerning the propriety of the measures which the abolitionists desire to recommend, but we marvel and we deplore that any difference can exist as to the freedom of discussion. We are astonished that even a single journal can be found, so forgetful of its own rights, to say nothing of its duties to the community, as to countenance, even indirectly, the idea of muzzling the press by the fear of violence.

For our own part we approve, we applaud, we would consecrate, if we could, to universal honor, the conduct of those

who bled in this gallant defence of the freedom of the press. Whether they erred or not in their opinions, they did not err in the conviction of their right as citizens of a democratic government, to express them, nor did they err in defending this right with an obstinacy which yielded only to death and the uttermost violence....

1837

A NEW PUBLIC PARK

The heats of summer are upon us, and while some are leaving the town for shady retreats in the country, others refresh themselves with short excursions to Hoboken or New Brighton, or other places among the beautiful environs of our city. If the public authorities, who expend so much of our money in laying out the city, would do what is in their power, they might give our vast population an extensive pleasure ground for shade and recreation in these sultry afternoons, which we might reach without going out of town.

On the road to Harlem, between Sixty-eighth street on the south and Seventy-seventh on the north, and extending from the Third Avenue to the East River, is a tract of beautiful woodland, comprising sixty or seventy acres, thickly covered with old trees, intermingled with a variety of shrubs. The surface is varied in a very striking and picturesque manner, with craggy eminences, and hollows, and a little stream runs through the midst. The swift tides of the East River sweep its rocky shores, and the fresh breeze of the bay comes in, on every warm summer afternoon, over the restless waters. The trees are of almost every species that grows in our woods: —the different varieties of oak, the birch, the beech, the linden, the mulberry, the tulip tree, and others; the azalea, the kalmia, and other flowering shrubs are in bloom here at their season, and the ground in spring is gay with flowers. There never was a finer situation for the public garden of a great city....

As we are now going on, we are making a belt of muddy docks all round the island. We should be glad to see one small part of the shore without them, one place at least where the tides may be allowed to flow pure, and the ancient brim of rocks which borders the waters left in its original picturesqueness and beauty. Commerce is devouring inch by inch the coast of the island, and if we would rescue any part of it for health and recreation it must be done now.

All large cities have their extensive public grounds and gardens, Madrid and Mexico City their Alamedas, London its Regent's Park, Paris its Champs Elysées, and Vienna its Prater. There are none of them, we believe, which have the same natural advantages of the picturesque and beautiful which belong to this spot. It would be of easy access to the citizens, and the public carriages which now rattle in almost every street in this city, would take them to its gates. The only objection which we can see to the plan would be the difficulty of persuading the owners of the soil to part with it.

If any of our brethren of the public press should see fit to support this project, we are ready to resign in their favor any claim to the credit of originally suggesting it.

1844

THE NEW FEDERAL CONSTITUTION

Some of the journalists who support the cause of the administration are pleasing themselves with the fancy that the decision of the Supreme bench of the United States in the Dred Scott case will put an end to the agitation of the slavery question. They will soon find their mistake. The feeling in favor of liberty is not so easily smothered; discussion is not so readily silenced. One specific after another has been tried, with the same view and with the same success. The Fugitive Slave law, we are told, was to quiet all agitation, but it did not; the Nebraska bill was to stop all controversy on the slavery question, but it proved to be oil poured on the flames. The usurpation of

the government of Kansas by the inroad from Missouri, was thought for a time to be a blow to the friends of liberty which they could not survive, but it only roused them to greater activity. The election of Mr. Buchanan as President in November was to put an end to the dispute, but since November the dispute has waxed warmer and warmer. It will never end till the cause of liberty has finally triumphed. Heap statute upon statute, follow up one act of Executive interference with another, add usurpation to usurpation, and judicial decision to judicial decision, the spirit against which they are levelled is indestructible. As long as the press and speech are free, the warfare will be continued, and every attempt to suppress it, by directing against it any part of the machinery of the government will only cause it to rage the more fiercely.

This has been the case hitherto. The more our Presidents have meddled with the matter—the more the majority in Congress have sought to stifle the discussion—the more force has been employed on the side of slavery, whether under the pretext of legal authority, as when Mr. Pierce called out the United States troops to enforce the pretended laws of Kansas, or, without that pretext, as when armed men crossed the border of that territory to make laws for the inhabitants, the more determined is the zeal by which the rights of freemen are asserted and upheld against the oligarchy. It will not cool the fiery temper of this zeal to know that slavery has enlisted the bench on its side; it will rather blow it into a stronger and more formidable flame.

Here are five slaveholding judges on the bench, disciples of this neologism of slavery—men who have espoused the doctrines lately invented by the southern politicians, and who seek to engraft them upon our code of constitutional law—men who alter our constitution for us, who find in it what no man of common sense, reading it for himself, could ever find, what its framers never thought of putting into it, what no man discerned in it till a very few years since it was seen, with the aid of optics sharpened by the eager desire to preserve the political ascendency of the slave states. We feel, in reading the opinions

of these men, that local political prejudices have gained the mastery of that bench and tainted beyond recovery the minds of the majority of the judges. The constitution which they now profess to administer, is not the constitution under which this country has lived for seventy years; it is not the constitution which Washington, Franklin and Jefferson, and the able jurists who filled the seat of justice in the calmer days of our republic, recognized; this is not the constitution to which we have so long looked up with reverence and admiration; it is a new constitution, of which we never heard till it was invented by Mr. Calhoun, and which we cannot see adopted by the judges of our federal courts without shame and indignation.

Hereafter, if this decision shall stand for law, slavery, instead of being what the people of the slave states have hitherto called it, their peculiar institution, is a federal institution, the common patrimony and shame of all the states, those which flaunt the title of free, as well as those which accept the stigma of being the Land of Bondage; hereafter, wherever our jurisdiction extends, it carries with it the chain and the scourge—wherever our flag floats, it is the flag of slavery. If so, that flag should have the light of the stars and the streaks of running red erased from it; it should be dyed black and its device should be the whip and the fetter.

Are we to accept, without question, these new readings of the constitution—to sit down contentedly under this disgrace—to admit that the constitution was never before rightly understood, even by those who framed it—to consent that hereafter it shall be the slaveholders' instead of the freemen's constitution? Never! Never! We hold that the provisions of the constitution, so far as they regard slavery, are now just what they were when it was framed, and that no trick of interpretation can change them. The people of the free states will insist on the old impartial construction of the constitution, adopted in calmer times—the construction given it by Washington and his contemporaries, instead of that invented by modern politicians in Congress and adopted by modern politicians on the bench.

What results will grow out of this decision—to what conflicts of legislation between the states and the federal government it may lead—with what difficulty these clashing views may be composed, or how this last attempt to sustain the cause of slavery, to spread it as widely and keep it in being as long as possible, may be overruled and rendered futile by causes now in operation, we do not undertake to conjecture.

1857

THE ELECTION OF LINCOLN

What the more sagacious calculators of chances in the different political parties were prepared for has now become a fact; the Republican party has triumphed, and Abraham Lincoln, if he lives to the Fourth of March next, will be President of the United States. An immense majority in the free states are now rejoicing in the result; a large minority of the citizens of southern states, hitherto trampled under the iron heel of an oligarchy which has shown itself as impatient of the freedom of thought as any of the despotisms of the Old World, are rejoicing with still more intense delight. Even in the slave states the elections have taken a turn which shows how strongly a large proportion of their people sympathize with their brethren of the North. Virginia, the most powerful of them all, has emphatically rebuked the disunionists and their treasonable schemes by giving her voice for Bell and Everett. In Kentucky, one of the most flourishing of the offshoots from Virginia, the disunionists are beaten by a large majority; Breckinridge, one of her sons, who should have had her vote, if he had not held opinions and cherished views offensive to her people, is set aside, and electors who are to vote for Bell are chosen by a large majority. In Maryland the struggle between Bell and Breckinridge is close, but the state would have gone for Bell by a considerable majority had not the friends of Lincoln nominated and supported a ticket of their own. Wilmington,

one of the most busy, enterprising and prosperous towns in any slave state, gives a majority of two hundred for the Lincoln ticket. Missouri turns her back on Breckinridge, and gives her vote to Douglas. It is impossible to regard these results of the election in that great belt of slave states which immediately adjoin the free, otherwise than as the strongest expression they could give of their inflexible determination to abide by our federal Union.

There are various causes of congratulation in this survey of our successes. It is most gratifying to see what we believe to be a righteous cause—the cause of justice and humanity—after a long and weary struggle, closed by a decisive triumph. It is consoling to those who cherish high hopes of the destinies of our race, to see a great people, after a long discussion, in which the subtlest skill has been employed to varnish over wrong and give it a semblance of fairness, and, after allowing itself for a time to be misled by these sophistries, at length breaking through them all, and deciding boldly and firmly for the right.

We congratulate the country, moreover, on having escaped the confusion, the agitations and the corruption which must almost necessarily attend the choice of a President by the House of Representatives. These dangers have of late been so strongly pressed upon the public attention that we need not dwell upon them here. This consideration had no doubt its effect in enabling us to foil the scheme of those who hoped, by a combination of all the factions opposed to the Republican party in the free states, to carry the choice of a President into Congress, and to convulse the Union with another series of manœuvres and intrigues, such as were put in motion last winter to prevent the election of a Republican Speaker.

We congratulate the country also in the termination of the almost frantic struggle of the slaveholders for the introduction of their baleful institution into the territories. How violent that struggle has been; how reckless those who were engaged in it have been of the plainest rules of justice, and how indifferent to the peace of the country, we need not stop to describe. The contest is now necessarily at an end; it can go no further.

The controversy is closed. There can be no hope of influencing the Executive to favor their designs; the expectation of reopening the slave trade to people these territories with African bondmen is at an end, never, probably, to be revived.

We might enlarge this list of reasons for congratulation to an indefinite extent; but we rather pass on to remark that our rejoicing at the success we have obtained should be sobered by the reflection that we have taken upon ourselves immense responsibilities which we must consider how we shall faithfully discharge. For two years to come we must expect to find a majority in both Houses of Congress influenced by a spirit of distrust, if not of hostility, to the Republican administration. We must have patience to wait till, by a wise and impartial course of conduct, by a strict regard to the rights of the states, by a careful abstinence from every doubtful exercise of authority, by a frugal administration of the finances, and by the selection of wise, able and upright men as the agents of the government in every post, distrust shall be changed to confidence, and hostility disarmed of its weapons. We have pronounced in favor of a most conscientious as well as most able man to fill the Executive chair. The administration of the federal government must be conformed in all respects to the character of our Chief Magistrate, or the hold which we have obtained on the people is lost. Our success in the election, by deciding one question, the extension of slavery to the territories, has deprived our party of one important bond of union, one of the most powerful causes which have attracted to it the interest and favor of the people. Its place can only be supplied by an earnest endeavor to distinguish the Republican administration by an enlightened zeal for the public welfare.

In closing our remarks we take this occasion to congratulate the old friends of the EVENING POST, who have read it for the last score of years or thereabouts, on this new triumph of the principles which it maintains. The Wilmot Proviso is now consecrated as a part of the national public policy by this election; but earlier than the Wilmot Proviso was the opposition of our journal to the enlargement of slavery. It began with the

first whisper of the scheme to annex Texas to the American Union, and it has been steadily maintained from that moment till now, when the right and justice of our cause is proclaimed, in a general election, by the mighty voice of a large majority of thirty millions of people.

1860

WHAT THE "CONSERVATIVES" WANT

There have been several attempts of late, in New York, Washington and elsewhere, to raise up what is facetiously called a "conservative" party, and it is perhaps worth while to examine a little into the meaning of these hitherto abortive efforts. What do these self-styled "conservative" gentlemen want, that they endeavor to raise up a party in the nation in opposition to the government, and to the men who have gone forth to fight the battles of the Union? They *say* they want the war carried on. Well, the war is going on; and the general they laud to the skies as the greatest commander in the world, whom they have forced upon the Administration and the country, is now doing his best to get out of the difficulties in which he perversely or blunderingly placed the largest and finest army we have. They *say* they want the Union and the constitution preserved. Well, the President has, in the opinion of all loyal men shown himself scrupulously faithful to his oath, and means, with all his might and the nation's, to preserve both Union and constitution. They *say* they want an honest and economical administration of the government—but such of these "conservative" leaders as have the luck to be in Congress, have, with a few exceptions, steadfastly voted for every "job" which has been brought before that body. They *say* they want freedom of speech. Good—so do we. But we remember when these self-elected "conservative" leaders, who are now so loud-mouthed about free speech, did their best to put down this right in this city, in Philadelphia, Cincinnati and elsewhere

at the North. We congratulate them on their conversion; we can only hope it will be as lasting as it is recent.

What these "conservative" gentlemen really want is the offices. When these languishing patriots whine about "the Union as it was," they mean the Union as it was under Buchanan, with honest John B. Floyd as Secretary of War, to arrange Fort Snelling jobs, Willett's Point purchases, and Utah expeditions, for the double purpose of enriching his friends and disarming the nation; with honest Jacob Thompson as Secretary of the Interior, to wink at the abstraction of millions of Indian Trust bonds; with honest James Buchanan himself, the elect of these "conservatives," in the Presidential chair, to dispense federal patronage to his friends to that extent that his administration was the most extravagant and the most corrupt the country has ever known—though he, too, came into office on the plea of economy, which his followers now echo.

The platform of these self-styled "conservatives" contains exactly seven political principles: five loaves and two fishes; and they are faithful to these, under all circumstances. They might indeed exclaim, with the pious editor in the Biglow Papers:

> "I *don't* believe in princerple,
> But, O, I *du* in interest."

The Union as it was under Pierce and Buchanan was what is called "rather a good thing" for our "conservative" friends. They had free access to the public treasury, and they emptied it. Buchanan abused poor Fillmore for spending forty millions a year; but in the first year of his own term he spent eighty millions, and left the treasury empty and bankrupt when he retired in disgrace from the high place in which he had foully betrayed a great nation. No wonder the conservative mouth waters for the flesh pots of Egypt. No wonder they cry out, like the Israelites of old, "We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers and the melons, and the leeks and the onions, and the garlic. But now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our

eyes." No wonder they are tender towards their rebellious masters, who, if they used them, aforetimes, at least fed them —at the people's expense.

1862

A CERTAIN AND AN UNCERTAIN POLICY

The political jumping-jacks who have constituted themselves leaders of the opposition are an unhappy set of people. They would like to go dead against the war; for that which is nearest their hearts is to make a new political alliance with the rebellious planters, to reinstate these aristocrats in their former supremacy over the southern people, and with their help once more to establish themselves in office, and prostitute the government to the uses of the planters. But, unhappy wretches, they feel that to declare for peace at any price, to favor the abasement of the nation at the feet of the rebels, squarely and openly, would be to court political ruin; therefore they straddle painfully a political fence, and endeavor to talk war and peace in the same breath. ...

The next four years will be, probably, the most important in our history. We have been sick and we are getting well; the treatment of the national physician has been cautious; he has avoided heroic methods; he has been, perhaps, slow—but he has been very careful, conscientious, watchful, and he has carried us thus far through a terrible disease in safety. He has gained experience in these three and a half years, and is a wiser and more capable physician at this moment than ever. We are getting well; but on the upward road we shall need the most skilful treatment, the most careful watching. At this moment up come Vallandigham, Wood, Cox, Voorhees, Long, Harris —a lot of fellows who have been flinging mud at the poor patient all the time he was ill, and have been constantly foretelling his speedy decease—and these impudent fellows cry out: "Don't keep on that hum-drum old doctor; bundle him out

neck and heels; allow us to recommend to you a gentleman who has invented a patent pill expressly to make you well. He will set you on your legs in a few days. He has not had much medical experience, to be sure; he never cured anybody; but just try his patent pill. *We* will guarantee its efficacy."

But the patient, who is *not* delirious or a natural fool, replies: Who are you, that recommend a quack to me? Are you not the same who so bitterly cursed me all these years, who flung mud at me, who prophesied my certain death? And do you now ask me to take a physician of your recommendation?

"Only try his patent pill," they reiterate. "We can't tell you exactly how it will work; we can't explain to you of what drugs it is compounded; you must not ask any troublesome questions; shut your eyes and bolt it, and you will see, fast enough, what will come of it."

The policy of Mr. Lincoln is declared and known. He has now guided the ship of state for more than three years; in that time of tremendous difficulty he has perhaps made mistakes, but he has acted throughout conscientiously, honorably, and with an honest and patriotic desire to do right. He has gained wisdom by experience. Every year has seen our cause more successful; every year has seen abler generals, more skilful leaders, called to the head; every year has seen fewer errors, greater ability, greater energy, in the administration of public affairs. The timid McClellan has been superseded by Grant, the do-nothing Buell by Sherman; wherever a man has shown conspicuous merit he has been called forward; political and military rivalries have been as far as possible banished from the field and from the national councils; all have been forced either to work honestly for the good of the country, or else to give place to more patriotic men. The result is a success which has grown year after year, which has falsified every prophecy of our enemies abroad, and filled them with astonishment at the immense military power which could be developed under the faithful and admirable organization of a Stanton, and the command of such great and unselfish leaders as Grant, Sherman, Thomas, Rosecrans, Farragut, and a host of others. There is

every reason to believe that, while Mr. Lincoln continues in power, this healthy and beneficial state of things will continue. The best men will be retained in command; the most effectual measures will be used against the public enemy; the most kindly and fraternal spirit will be displayed towards the unfortunate people who have been the unwilling tools of the rebellious planters. Under his guidance we have the assurance that the war will be conducted vigorously while an enemy remains on our territory and insults our flag; and when peace comes by that enemy's submission, we have an equal assurance that he will require no conditions which freemen may not grant; he will demand for the nation only, to use his own words, "Everything for security, but nothing for revenge."

And what are we asked to substitute for this well-defined and honorable and satisfactory policy? Nobody knows. The opposition have not yet agreed upon it. They attempted to tell the nation through their resolutions at Chicago; but they are already ashamed of those. They may presently get ashamed of their candidate's letter. Just now they are quarreling amongst themselves about its meaning. Some declare it means submission to Jeff. Davis; some that it means war, without the help of Negro troops, and without conscription: war, that is to say, which shall begin by weakening the armies, and of course end in defeat. But whatever it may be found to mean, it includes subversion of all the most important measures of the present administration; it means disorganization of the war power; it means the substitution, for Grant and Sherman, of generals long since shelved as incapable, men who have had small experience to teach them, and who are to be resurrected only as political favorites. It includes, by the open assertion of opposition speakers, the return to slavery of more than a hundred thousand Union soldiers who now guard our detached posts and fight the enemy. It means weakening the army, and thus necessarily prolonging the war and ensuring a disgraceful peace.

1864

INTRODUCTION TO *A LIBRARY OF POETRY AND SONG*

There are two tendencies by which the seekers after poetic fame in our day are apt to be misled, through both the example of others and the applause of critics. One of these is the desire to extort admiration by striking novelties of expression; and the other, the ambition to distinguish themselves by subtleties of thought, remote from the common apprehension.

With regard to the first of these I have only to say what has been often said before, that, however favorable may be the idea which this luxuriance of poetic imagery and of epithet at first gives us of the author's talent, our admiration soon exhausts itself. We feel that the thought moves heavily under its load of garments, some of which perhaps strike us as tawdry and others as ill-fitting, and we lay down the book to take it up no more.

The other mistake, if I may so call it, deserves more attention, since we find able critics speaking with high praise of passages in the poetry of the day to which the general reader is puzzled to attach a meaning. This is often the case when the words themselves seem simple enough, and keep within the range of the Saxon or household element of our language. The obscurity lies sometimes in the phrase itself, and sometimes in the recondite or remote allusion. I will not say that certain minds are not affected by this, as others are by verses in plainer English. To the few it may be genuine poetry, although it may be a riddle to the mass of readers. I remember reading somewhere of a mathematician who was affected with a sense of sublimity by the happy solution of an algebraical or geometrical problem, and I have been assured by one who devoted himself to the science of mathematics that the phenomenon is no uncommon one. Let us beware, therefore, of assigning too narrow limits to the causes which produce the poetic exaltation of mind. The genius of those who write in this manner

may be freely acknowledged, but they do not write for mankind at large.

To me it seems that one of the most important requisites for a great poet is a luminous style. The elements of poetry lie in natural objects, in the vicissitudes of human life, in the emotions of the human heart, and the relations of man to man. He who can present them in combinations and lights which at once affect the mind with a deep sense of their truth and beauty is the poet for his own age and the ages that succeed it. It is no disparagement either to his skill or his power that he finds them near at hand; the nearer they lie to the common track of the human intelligence, the more certain is he of the sympathy of his own generation, and of those which shall come after him. The metaphysician, the subtile thinker, the dealer in abstruse speculations, whatever his skill in versification, misapplies it when he abandons the more convenient form of prose and perplexes himself with the attempt to express his ideas in poetic numbers.

Let me say for the poets of the present day, that in one important respect they have profited by the example of their immediate predecessors; they have learned to go directly to nature for their imagery, instead of taking it from what had once been regarded as the common stock of the guild of poets. I have often had occasion to verify this remark with no less delight than surprise on meeting in recent verse new images in their untarnished lustre, like coins fresh from the mint, unworn and unsoiled by passing from pocket to pocket. It is curious, also, to observe how a certain set of hackneyed phrases, which Leigh Hunt, I believe, was the first to ridicule, and which were once used for the convenience of rounding out a line or supplying a rhyme, have disappeared from our poetry, and how our blank verse in the hands of the most popular writers has dropped its stiff Latinisms and all the awkward distortions resorted to by those who thought that by putting a sentence out of its proper shape they were writing like Milton.

1870

POETRY

SAMUEL SILLEN

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